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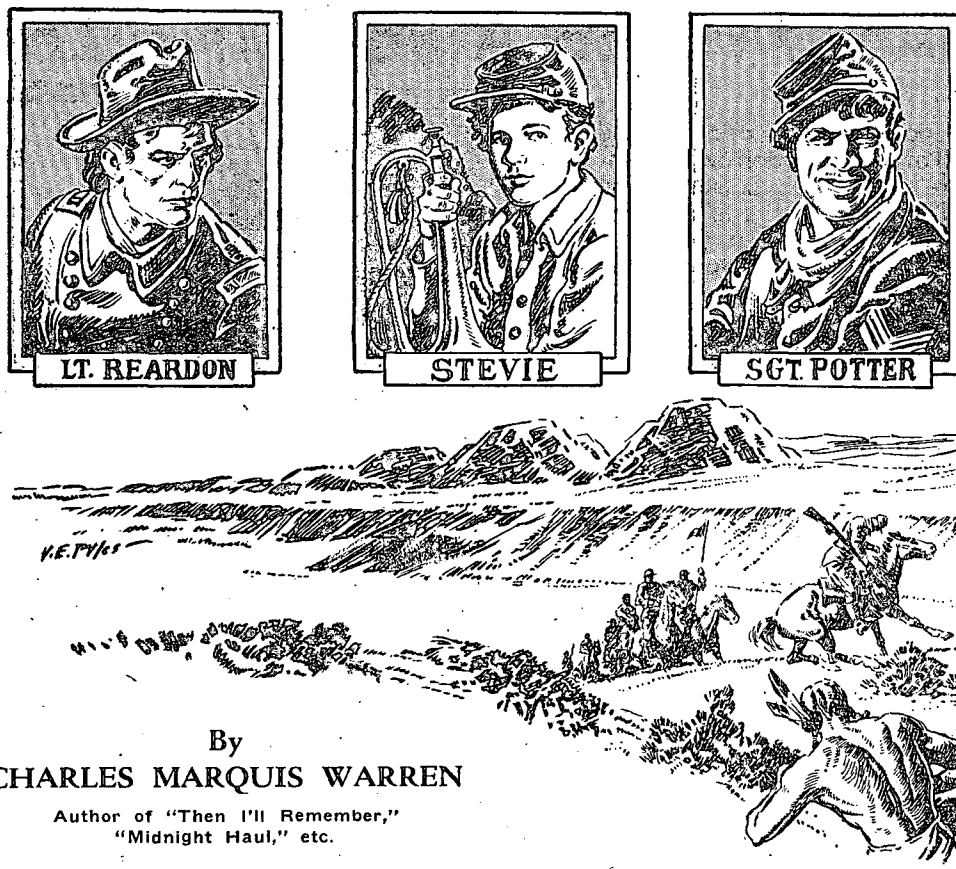

By
CHARLES MARQUIS WARREN

Author of "Then I'll Remember," "Midnight Haul," etc.

Bugles Are For Soldiers

Blow the charge, boy; lead these men to glory, and never mind the dents in your horn. For other bugles are sounding within them, to each man his own call, so that each must fight two battles at once. But none shall heat their blood so much as that name Deesohay—Scourge of the Southwest Territory

Foreword

Almost every story has a hero; and this one is certainly no exception. But in a larger sense we are concerned here with the intimate personal stories of more than a dozen men who learned (some of them too late) what the fighting was about.

The Civil War is over; the Union endures. But the body of the Nation continues to writhe, tortured and flayed by the savagery still rampant in Indian Territory. And as soldiers march out from Fort Wingate, their scalps tighten in painful anticipation of the knife whose wielder lurks behind every covert.

There are heroes among these men; and some whom you could call villains or fools or cowards. But in the tangled threads of their separate lives you will find why these classifications don't always fit as neatly as they should. And how the things that happen to them square with the things that happen in them.

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A Novel as Great and Gallant as the Men Who Are Its Heroes

CHAPTER I

MEN READY FOR MADNESS

AROUND midnight, on the third day of the retreat, Sergeant Crispin lost his mind. The column was moving as quietly as possible through the blackness of a ravine.

They moved in single file, hugging the right side of the ravine, for there the darkness was heaviest and what manner of safety they could expect lay in the dark. Seventy-five shapeless shadows of weary men; seventy-five black bulks of tired horses.

There had been more—almost twice as many three days ago, before they reached the Pass. But the Pass was a vague recollection now, its terrifying aspect numbed by the seventy-two hours they had spent falling back.

Sergeant Crispin carried a sagittate piece of flint in his chest, under and oblique to his breast bone. His brother, Private Bowie Crispin, had tried to extract it with his service knife during the rare and dismally short periods of rest which Lieutenant Reardon had allowed the command, but succeeded only in making it worse.

"Keep hanging on," Bowie Crispin had urged his brother. "Try keeping thoughts in your head."

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He had a thin dour face, well boned, but with pock-marks visible under the ebony burn of his skin. He spoke with the slur of a Virginian.

"Once we get through this ravine it'll only be a pace to the Owen's ranch. Miss Angela will see you're taken care of."

He glared up toward the head of the column. "If Reardon had let us stop a spell long enough I'd have got that flint out and patched you up fine. Keep your mind working, Dan. Don't go empty. I know it hurts."

But Sergeant Crispin did not hear. He leaned heavily against his horse as he walked him. Already his head began to wobble unnaturally, and he muttered soft incoherencies that made his brother narrow his dark eyes and run a parched tongue over his lips.

Sergeant Crispin began to stumble. His babbling became a steady drone which he was not entirely conscious of.

PRIVATES CARLSON and Burnstedt, immediately ahead, began to worry about him in connection with themselves. He was getting louder.

They kept looking back but they couldn't make him out, for the moon had already crossed above the ravine leaving their closely hugged right wall in dense shadow; but they kept looking anxiously at his place in the file, listening to his droning and hearing him blunder along beside his horse.

"He's going to pipe up all of a sudden," Carlson whispered ahead over his horse's neck. "Them devils put something on their flints to make certain you get it. Poison. It takes a man hard."

Burnstedt's hoarse answer slid along his animal's rump. "I always told him. He's been fighting them devils too long. Or it's the sun. Maybe he'd gone a mite crazy afore he ever felt that flint. I told him."

"And he'll start yelling. And where'll we be?"

"Spotted. If we ain't already which I think we are."

From up the line Senior Sergeant Potter's voice hissed.

"Quiet those lice-bit tongues. Is Crispin's brother looking after Dan?"

"I'm doing what I can," Private Crispin's voice came back.

"See that he don't lose his head and yell."

Private Crispin reached out his fingers to touch his brother, but the sergeant was too far in front so he dropped his hand. The bitterness in him seemed to form in his throat and made him swallow hard.

He concentrated this bitterness on the figure he knew to be at the head of the column. If Reardon had permitted one halt of over fifteen minutes his brother's breathing might not be so dangerously crepitant and there was a chance he wouldn't be mumbling like a man demented.

Not that his brother's welfare was of paramount interest to Bowie Crispin. He hadn't seen Dan for six or seven years up until the last month and he could work up little compassion for him now.

Dan had invited this kind of death by enlisting out here in '60 and by choosing to remain, when he should have returned at the outbreak of the war and taken over a Richmond company as was the duty of a gentleman of blood.

Yet Private Crispin did not blame Dan for his own predicament. He had not come out here because of his brother. Nor did he lay the blame on the United States Government, for no gentleman officially recognized the

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fledgling Northern conquerors to be the superiors of Jeff Davis and the extinct Confederacy.

Nor would he bring censure home to himself, because he believed himself in no way responsible for his plight.

So he centralized his rebuke upon the column-leading figure he couldn't see, knowing that to be tangible and something he could understand.

He didn't hold with taking orders from a primitive Yankee lieutenant in a land where soldiers fought not like men but like the savages who were their enemies. He closed his fingers tightly over his horse's nostrils and found himself wishing he'd had Lieutenant Reardon as a recruit with him at Shiloh. He derived a vicious pleasure from the thought.

The column moved quietly with that stealth which comes to men when caution means life. Only the babbling of Sergeant Crispin sounded along with the occasional clop *of an animal's hoof as it glanced a rock on the sandy bottom of the deep ravine.*

PRIVATE CARLSON closed his eyes as he walked. He turned his thoughts over pleasantly in his mind and tasted them. He was going home as soon as the detail returned to the post. He'd put in for a furlough and it had finally come through.

For the first time in more than three years he'd see Myrna, and Benton, who ought to be a sturdy seven-and-a-half and who might have completed a year at Miss Carrie's six-kid school by now.

And there would be the shy thrill of seeing little Myrna, whose hair he'd read in Myrna's proud letters was corn yellow like her own, and who was three weeks away from birth when he'd left.

But most of all there would be the peaceful green flatness of far-off middle Missouri with the Ozark plateaus visible on sunny days. And Myrna—Myrna for three solid uninterrupted months.

Private Carlson's satisfaction, almost absorbed the fatigue from his shuffling legs. He smiled and patted his horse's neck softly and opened his eyes. Then he frowned as he tried to penetrate the darkness toward the head of the column.

It had just occurred to him. Seeing Myrna and the kids and the gentle plateaus didn't depend on himself at all. Nor on the Indians. Nor on his granted furlough. Not even, he calculated humbly, on God.

He strained his eyes forward. It depended on the ability of the man at the head of the column to get them through to the post. If Lieutenant Reardon could do it . . .

He fell to thinking about Lieutenant Reardon. It was a downright shame about Lieutenant Reardon.

For the moment Sergeant Crispin's droning had relapsed into a toneless song which he hummed softly, making no sense of the words. You could hear the pain of his chest in the tone. There was the faint jingling of a bit chain, quickly silenced.

The column groped slowly forward.

PRIVATE BURNSTEDT also had his eyes closed, not in order that he might visualize but to shut off his skittery mind's sight.

He couldn't get away from the Pass. It nauseated him. It was the most vicious picture he could recall in his record of bitter campaigns.

And he knew, finally, that this had been one too many. He knew fright

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now. It was one with his thoughts and it was his only thought.

He was not ashamed. He remembered the way he'd leaned on his carbine and reached on Joe Hendrick's body, and he wasn't ashamed. Joe wouldn't have minded. Joe hadn't any hair left. Joe's hair dangled wet and red from his skin on the end of that devil's lance.

Private Burnstedt had got the devil in the belly; and it was the last shot Private Burnstedt had fired. He'd spent the rest of that carnal half hour retching and trembling and knowing fear. He was trembling now.

It was too bad he was through, but it was a cold fact and he faced it. His hitch was up in three weeks. He'd go East. He couldn't stand any more things like those in the Pass.

Lieutenant Reardon would have to get the column through so Private Burnstedt would not shame himself and B Company by exhibiting this new fear. If the column got back safely it would remain his own secret. Lieutenant Reardon had to make it and Private Burnstedt squinted ahead in the blackness and wondered if he could.

*

The moon receded and its pale light began to creep up the steep left wall of the ravine. Presently the entire defile would be inky. In complete blackness it would be more difficult to progress, but infinitely safer.

A voice cursed out loud as an animal's hoof descended on the toe of some unwary trooper's boot. Sergeant Lemuel Potter lashed out with sibilant invective and the swearing immediately ceased.

Damn' lice-bit rookies. Sergeant Potter's thoughts were superior and scornful. A regular, seasoned by many arduous campaigns, he had no use for most of the men making up this detail.

What's in the Government's mind, packing these foot-in-mouth greenhorns out here to us? Junior Sergeant Crispin, Corporal Casy and Privates Carlson and Burnstedt and a damnably few others were all that were left of the command's old liners. And here Crispin was dying and there was something unaccountably wrong with Burnstedt.

Lieutenant Reardon had better jumping sight get the detail back to the post or they'd all be killed and never know what did it. Once in the post Sergeant Potter would have a chance to whip them into some semblance of shape. And he would if it killed them one by one.

But first the lieutenant would have to gentle them through.

Sergeant Potter, shrewd, seasoned, loyal, felt an unfamiliar twinge of sympathy as he thought of Lieutenant Reardon. I don't blame you a mite if you don't want to get us through, Lieutenant.

Not a mite of blame. You got nothing waiting for you but a cooking. From the commandant, from her, and indirectly from that young flea-whelp St. John.

You got no reason to bring us through. You're maybe hoping we won't never make it—and maybe we won't and then these blundering blinkers they give us will know this ain't no Johnny-shoot-me-nicely fighting we're doing out here.

Lieutenant, it's a lice-bit shame and I don't blame you.

. . . A mile and a half of the ravine left. Then they would be out in the open. A tension ran down the column.

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Things had gone too well since nightfall. The feel in the hot night air wasn't right. Sergeant Crispin was muttering aloud again—loud, loud. The column kept on moving.

FARTHER up the line Private Rankin held tightly to the tail of Private Stooder's horse and in this fashion managed not to stumble and fall out of file.

Private Rankin wasn't used to this sort of thing. There'd been no wild desolate country like this in Georgia, or at Second Bull Run or at Gettysburg; no black nights which made it impossible to see your hand in front of your face in spite of moon and stars.

A cold sweat streaked the alkali on Private Rankin's face as for a moment he allowed his mind to dwell on the events in the Pass.

It was like nothing he had ever known before, and he was considered by fighting men to be a hardened, likely soldier. He'd been with Pickett's Virginians when they charged across those fourteen hundred yards to Cemetery Ridge at Gettysburg and he hadn't imagined there could be any worse slaughter; but then he hadn't known about the Pass.

He would have to learn how to fight this new way; he'd listen and absorb everything he could. Sergeant Potter was a hard man but he could learn a lot from the veteran. He mustn't come out again as unversed in this strange phase of fighting as he'd been in the Pass.

He was a good soldier and it was his life and he meant to make it a successful life. But before he could accomplish that, Lieutenant Reardon would have to bring this detail safely back to the post.

Apprehensively he looked forward to where the head of the column should be. This Lieutenant Reardon. . . Rankin felt a certain amount of disgust tinged with uncertainty. This man wasn't much like old Auburn Locks Pickett, you bet. You couldn't feel the same security entrusting your fate to a man who fought the enemy as this lieutenant did, and who let things happen to his command like what happened back in the Pass. . . .

Private Stooder was a Yankee from Vermont and not much on thinking. At present he was concentrating what mental faculties he possessed on the difficult and unfamiliar feat of maintaining contact with the rump of the preceding trooper's horse without planting his boots under the animal's hoofs. It did not occur to him to reach for the switching tail.

Stooder was interested in the man immediately behind him. He'd heard Private Rankin had been a member of Pickett's division in that charge. He couldn't wait to inform Rankin that he himself had been one of those under Meade who had lain behind the wall on Cemetery Ridge and watched them come—and cut them down.

If Lieutenant What's-his-name up there in front got them through, he and Rankin could get together and there would be some high talk and recollections. It would be right fair.

. . . Less than a mile now. The column moved, but more stiffly, and the knowledge of something about to happen descended on the men and they put hands to their carbines and wondered.

*

Steve Vance, the bugler for B, was barely fourteen years old and red-

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headed. He knew what a tantalizing prize his carrot-top had presented to those devils in the Pass. It made him shiver when he thought of it—which was not now.

He clutched his dilapidated bugle close to his chest and stumbled light-footedly in front of Jean DuVal, the guidon bearer, and could only dwell on his consuming hatred for Lieutenant St. John.

Stevie had never before known the sense of humiliation and inadequacy which the young lieutenant had brought to him. He'd never forget that incident of the bugle back at the post if he lived to see Judgment Day. And he would never forgive St. John.

He figured he hated St. John almost as much as he adored Lieutenant Reardon. It made something wet and hot come to his eyes at the thought of St. John taking over Lieutenant Reardon's command when they got back.

Stevie would desert, or quit, or maybe steal some of the post store's whiskey and get firewatered up and thrown into the guardhouse for life.

*

The desultory muffled *clomp* of the moving column. . . .

Sergeant Crispin suddenly gave vent to a sob of laughter. With both arms locked around his horse's neck, he was being virtually dragged. He laughed again, the sound of his laughter doing a ghostly ricochet against the walls of the ravine.

Private Carlson aroused himself from his Missouri home-coming reverie and turned his head.

"It's all right, Sergeant. Lord, it's all right. Take it easy."

And for the moment Sergeant Crispin quieted. The moon could not be seen now and it was close to midnight. With Sergeant Crispin quiet the column made no other sound in its moving.

But danger made a sound, too subtle for them to hear.

CHAPTER II

DEATH IN FEATHERS

JERRY KITCHEN, the hired scout, walked at the head of the column, ten paces in front. He carried his long Spencer in the crook of his arm and it was not necessary for him to lead his horse. Daisy and Jerry had been an integral part of each other for a good many seasons.

Every instinct in Jerry Kitchen told him that something was afoot, about to happen. His instincts had an ugly way of ruffling his placidity when danger was miles and sometimes days away.

When it was close—Jerry Kitchen shifted the cut of tobacco to his other cheek and spat adroitly and silently. There was no use in telling the lieutenant what he sensed. He and the lieutenant were fast friends and had weathered many fierce seasons out here. The lieutenant was able to sense this country almost as well as Jerry, and the lieutenant needed no warning now.

Jerry fell to wondering how himself and St. John would get along. A dull anger tugged at his lips as he thought of how he'd miss Lieutenant Johnny. Blast the ways of the Army.

His leathery lips grinned a little to himself as he wondered whether Lieutenant Johnny had any intention at all of bringing the detail back safely.

Say the word, Lieutenant, and you and me could scoot right this minute and in maybe twenty minutes there

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wouldn't be no detail; there wouldn't be no green dandy to take over when we get back; not with things beginning to brew around here like they are. You and me'd be the only white-talkers to show up alive and that'd put you right square on top of the heap with the Army again.

Jerry Kitchen sniffed expertly at the blackness and canted his head to listen for any sounds from the top of the ravine. Now and again he put his hand back and felt Daisy's ears and nostrils. An animal was the best telegraph in the world when unseen things were around.

They were having trouble with the wounded man. He was much too loud. His brother made an effort to quiet him, but the effort was half-hearted and did not have much effect.

*

Lieutenant Dennis St. John, except when he stumbled over scattered rocks, walked stiffly erect as he might have walked six months ago at the command "Pass in Review!" for that last evening parade on the Plain at West Point. Disappointment came now with his recollection of the Point. The tradition of the service had stood for so much there. He'd had his expectations.

And then they had sent him here to Fort Wingate, in the Territory. The burning heat, the listless routine of the post, men fighting savages who were animals—and fighting them as animals fight—and losing to them.

No life, no green fresh life. Officers indistinguishable from enlisted men except by their uniforms. And Lieutenant John Reardon.

That had been the worst shock of all. He still could not look at Reardon without visualizing him as he had been when St. John was a plebe at the Point and Reardon was graduating, honor man, ranking first in everything the Point had to offer.

There hadn't been a cadet who would not have exchanged places with John Reardon and the future they'd predicted for him. That had been in '64. The war was virtually over and they had sent Reardon out here to fight Indians and help with the expansion of the western boundary of the United States.

And look at him now. Promotion hadn't been his, but failure had. And after that debacle in the Pass, Dennis St. John could understand why.

He had no sympathy for Reardon. St. John's first god was the service. He had seen his idol, decadent from the campaigns out here, crumble to pieces before his eyes; had seen a West Point man mishandle a command until what might conceivably have been an honorable defeat was turned into a disgraceful headlong rout.

So, although he was not pleased to be taking over Reardon's job, he could justify it easily by recognizing the necessity here for a military man who was not afraid to exercise his military training in forcefully bringing this territory to heel.

He did not permit himself to think of Angela Owen, or that unavoidable incident with the young redheaded trumpeter. If he took over Reardon's girl as well as Reardon's command, that was within the ordinances of both love and war. He himself would be the last to complain were the situation reversed.

The bugler, of course—that had been awkward and a bit uncomfortable for the moment; but these ragamuf-

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fins out here had got to realize that their period of laxity and indolence was at an end, and the sooner they realized it the better.

It seemed to Dennis St. John that Reardon was making no particular effort to haste. That was one of his faults, one of his many inadequacies as an officer. There was no place for him out here. Once he got the detail back to the post. . . .

The drone of the delirious man was high. It was midnight and they were almost ready to emerge from the defile. But no one allowed himself a breath of relief.

LIEUTENANT JOHN REARDON led his horse in the second position, at the head of the column but behind Jerry Kitchen and immediately in front of Lieutenant St. John.

John Reardon was tired. He was aware of things without being conscious of them; they came to him as if from a great distance.

He knew, for instance, that something was wrong and that Jerry Kitchen had sensed it too. He knew also that Sergeant Crispin's ranting was now much too loud for the continued safety of the column and that he had better pass the word down the line to—

It happened just then. Sergeant Crispin's voice rose to a shrill crescendo. He began to scream, high screams that reverberated up and down the ravine and pierced the ears of the men and horses and brought the column to an abrupt halt. Man and beast stood rooted to the spot, paralyzed by the culmination of their dread. They had known all along that this would happen.

For the space of perhaps ten seconds there was no movement. The sergeant's trebly voice poured layer on layer of uncontrolled cries which were prolonged and contorted by echoes.

With the strength that comes to a dying man in the last minutes, he flung himself on his horse and before restraining hands could reach him, had wheeled the animal out of line and spurred madly across the ravine floor.

He did not stop screaming. Thirty feet away from the column he emerged from the blackness into the moonlight of the opposite side. Horse and rider appeared to be a moving composition of bright silver.

Then abruptly the screaming ceased and both Crispin and the horse were down. There was a convulsive kicking of the beast's legs and the heap was motionless.

Reardon said softly, "Jerry."

"Yeah, Johnny." And the scout took the reins of his and Reardon's horses and stuffed them into the young bugler's hands. "Hold 'em a mite, Stevie."

Lieutenant St. John's voice came brittly out of the darkness:

"You're not going to leave him there, Reardon. I won't permit that." He turned to the invisible column and raised his voice. "I want two men to retrieve—"

Reardon whispered, "It's all right, Dennis. We'll get him. But there's a way to do it." He and the scout moved quietly down the line.

Private Bowie Crispin looked out on the silver-bathed remains of his brother. He felt no emotion other than excitement and the quicker kindling of the hatred he felt for Lieutenant Reardon.

"If you'd let us stop so I could have patched him," he muttered.

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DOWN the ravine, thirty feet below the bodies of the sergeant and his horse, a figure bounded into the moonlight. It was Jerry Kitchen.

He shook his fist at the top side of the ravine and immediately turned and began running, zig-zagging a crazy course and howling as he ran. He pursued this course for thirty yards, turned and abruptly disappeared once more into the blackness which covered the taut, staring troopers.

The eyes of the column, which had been riveted on the convolutions of the scout, swung back to the spot where Sergeant Crispin had lain. He was no longer there. Lieutenant Reardon was merging with the protective shadow of the wall, staggering under the burden of the sergeant's body which was slung across his left shoulder.

He groped his way along the column, stopped and eased the body to the ground.

"Private Crispin?" Reardon's voice was quiet but it could be clearly heard by the men.

"Here." Bowie Crispin's voice was surly.

"Your brother is dead, Crispin. I'm sorry. He was a fine soldier. You can lash him across your saddle and at least he'll get a decent burial when we reach the post."

"I don't want to carry him in. He won't be any liver at the post than he is here. If you'd let us stop long enough for me to patch him up—"

There was silence. Reardon's voice came wearily and not unkindly.

"I understand how you feel, Crispin. I'm sorry I couldn't permit longer halts. Perhaps that might have saved him. But you'll have to carry your brother—"

"Let him stay here. He's dead. He doesn't care now. It's your fault."

Silence. Lieutenant St. John had stumbled through the blackness down the line. Now his voice whipped out coldly.

"Private Crispin, lash your brother's body to your animal at once or I'll have you flogged within an inch of your life when we return to the post."

Crispin started.

"Yes, sir." That was a voice he respected and understood. That was Army. It sounded like the voice of that Yankee major at Shiloh when he'd told Crispin what he thought of him. Crispin refused to recall that—ever.

He bent to his brother's body, and hastily recoiled.

Private Rankin's Georgian drawl piped up as he addressed St. John. "Sir, it's maybe a mite unpleasant for Crispin to be cartin' his own brother's remains, and me bein' not very squeamish, I could do it if the lieutenant's willing."

If he were to learn campaign fighting Private Rankin calculated he might as well get off to a good beginning by getting next to St. John, seeing that Reardon was to be relieved.

St. John's voice was curt. "Private Crispin has his orders."

Crispin had straightened up. "Lord," he said softly. "I didn't know. . . ."

Jerry Kitchen came up. He was still breathing hard from running. They could hear him.

Reardon said, "Jerry?"

"Yeah, Johnny."

"Nice decoy, Jerry."

St. John said succinctly, "Reardon, I'm afraid I can't endorse the tactics you employed to retrieve Crispin's body. It was a deliberate risk of life to send Kitchen out there to perform those childish antics."

"I know, Dennis. But we have to employ their tactics here. Safest."

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"Their?"

"Yes. There are three Indians on top of the right wall of the ravine. They've been following us."

"Three Indians? How do you—"

"Four of 'em, Johnny," Jerry Kitchen said. "I got one in my hair I can't get out."

St. John's voice was indignant.

"What are you talking about?"

"Bend down and touch Sergeant Crispin," Reardon said.

St. John stooped over, an exploring hand groping for the body. "Good Lord!" He straightened up quickly, wiped his hand on his tunic.

REARDON said, "Sort of made a pin-cushion out of him, didn't they? Two through the throat, one almost exactly through his original wound. If he hadn't been yelling you could have heard the noise they made in flight. Like a mosquito next to your ear.

"Jerry, you got it out yet?"

"No. The tip's stuck in my hair. I tell you it give my head a mite of a jerk stoppin' that shaft."

Jerry Kitchen's hair was known in every part of the Territory. It was golden, which was surprising for a man of over forty summers, and hung in unkempt curling locks to his shoulders. When the sun caught it, it glittered with an aura that was the envy of every white woman in the Territory and the wonder of every squaw.

His mustache was the same color and long and silken, drooping over the corners of his lips. Jerry was meticulous, with a child-like vanity, about his hair and moustache.

Reardon felt for him in the dark and carefully detached the yellow curls from the feathered tip of the shaft.

"Thank ye, Johnny." Jerry took the arrow, broke it in two and threw it away.

"They'll be gone by now," Reardon said. He looked up at the rims.

"Yeah. They was flankers, followin' to find out where we're headed. They'll be scootin' back to him and blabbin' everything they know and some they don't."

"It's safe for us to proceed openly for a time. I'd hoped we weren't being followed." Reardon said it for St. John's benefit, but he knew Jerry Kitchen would understand. Jerry knew he'd been fervently hoping that they were followed.

"We wouldn't have knowed it yet, Johnny, if the sargint hadn't come out'n his mind. An Apache just can't resist puttin' a flint into a uniform when he knows he won't get nothing in return."

Crispin had lashed his brother to his saddle. It was difficult to do in the dark. It had made him sick. The body was still warm and was very sticky. Reardon said gently:

"Crispin, you'd better exchange mounts with Rankin."

St. John had recovered his composure.

"Lieutenant, I'll thank you not to reverse my orders. Crispin will ride his own horse."

The fatigue in Reardon's voice was heavy. "Dennis, you're senior lieutenant and I'm junior. You rank me, boy. But until this detail ends, I'm in command. Rankin, exchange mounts with Crispin."

Crispin moved slowly to the other trooper's animal. He muttered half audibly. "It's your fault. It's your dirty ignorant fault. You're no fit officer. I'll see you in Hell for this—and for other things."

No one was paying any attention to

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him. Reardon was saying. "We'll move along now. It won't be much time before he starts after us."

He moved up the line, feeling the stickiness of his neck and left shoulder where he'd held the sergeant's body. Jerry Kitchen and St. John followed him to the head of the column.

Reardon climbed up on his horse and said, "All right, Stevie."

The bugler raised his battered trumpet to his lips and gave forth his conception of *Prepare to Mount* and then *Mount,* and at the touch of Reardon's hand on his shoulder, *Forward.*

The troop held its cadence to a walk and after a moment Reardon bawled, "Column by twos . . . Hoo-o!" and they formed double file and cantered, one of the files riding openly in the moonlight of the left side—secure and giving no thought to the targets they presented because Lieutenant Reardon had pronounced the danger momentarily over. . . .

CHAPTER III

BEWARE THIS SMOKE

BY NINE o'clock the heat of the climbing sun was intense. The column traced a long thin line in the open desert, two abreast.

Lieutenant Reardon had dispatched no advance scouts. He did not deem it necessary yet to post lookouts on the wings, but had Sergeant Potter and Private Burnstedt riding a good deal to the rear of the column. Attack would come from that direction if it came at all.

It was with an effort that Reardon did not slump in the saddle; the physical weariness he could bear with the immeasurable patience of the border soldier, but the mental fatigue was almost too much.

Each step of his animal carried him one pace nearer to the post and tactful but unrelenting military disgrace. And before that, many, many steps closer than that, another inescapable and humiliating defeat—to be met at the Owen ranch.

Jerry Kitchen dropped his horse back to ride for a moment alongside Reardon. The gangling scout extended something brown and dirty in his hand.

"Chaw, Johnny?"

"Thanks."

"They're a good ways behind us, Lieutenant."

"If they're there at all. They might not be coming."

"After all the contrivin' you been at these past seasons? They'll be comin'. It's my claim you're the only white critter to line up in brains against Deesohay, Johnny. Excepting naturally and of course myself."

Reardon watched Jerry Kitchen as the scout spurred forward to his position some thirty or forty yards in advance of the column. He looked at Jerry's glorious golden hair spilling over the shoulders of the dirty buckskin of his shirt and, imagined what the Indians must think of it.

He wished Jerry's hair and mustache were all he had to dwell upon now. He had not spoken to St. John, riding behind him abreast of Corporal Casy and DuVal, the guidon bearer. It seemed St. John was content with the silence, almost eager for it, as if he were waiting.

It must be an uncomfortable situation to be in, Reardon thought, being the officer who was to take over a friend's command because the friend had failed in the line of duty. So he had spared St. John the embarrassment of conversation.

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A MILE back and out of sight of the column, Sergeant Potter and Private Burnstedt rolled easily in their saddles as they cantered their mounts.

Private Burnstedt was constantly rising in his stirrups, turning and throwing long, anxious looks at the country behind. After a while Sergeant Potter bit off a corner of his tobacco plug, passed it to Burnstedt, and remarked without looking at the other man:

"You've cleaned our back-trail with your eyes nigh a dozen times in a dozen minutes, Burnstedt. What's got into ye?"

Burnstedt handed the plug back and chewed rapidly. He too looked straight ahead.

"Touch of the sun, I reckon. Or maybe I been fightin' 'em too long, Lem. Like I said, a man can fight 'em too long. He gets tired of it." His chest was suddenly empty of breath. No man must seek out and know the strange new terror which had come over him. He was at last beginning to feel ashamed.

Sergeant Potter jerked his head away and spat.

"I'm thinking I never saw ye this way before."

Burnstedt held himself rigid in the saddle.

"Maybe it was the Pass, Lem. Maybe I suddenly thought what's the good of this anyway. I've done my share and should ought to be spendin' my next few years back East makin' up for the pleasures I been missin', and gettin' ready for whatever's left."

"I noticed you in the Pass. . . . Never mind looking back. I just looked and there's nothing there that ain't been there a thousand years."

Burnstedt checked the overwhelming desire to turn and make certain. His tongue seemed to swell and dry inside his mouth. He said with a heavy attempt at lightness:

"Funny how sudden it come over me I ought to settle down. Another year campaigning this territory and no woman'd take a first look at the map I got, which'd have another year's layer of sun and wrinkles and age. I ain't gettin' nowheres younger or prettier. I allow I ought to quite afore it goes too far."

Burnstedt felt a vast relief. His explanation had rung true, even to himself. He risked a hasty glance over his shoulder, saw nothing, and spat with relish.

Sergeant Potter remarked, "Yeah. Funny."

Burnstedt whipped a look at him but the sergeant's terra cotta face was inscrutable. Burnstedt said too quickly to be casual:

"You think we'll likely run into something 'fore we get back to the post?"

"I ain't the one to be saying. Might and might not. Lieutenant Reardon's the canniest officer in the Territory to my way of thinking, and that's because he's learned the Indian's way of thinking and adopted it for his own."

"You think . . . he might be aimin' to set a trap?"

"He ain't in the habit of confiding his military tactics to me."

"But once we get to the Owen ranch there ain't liable to happen much from there on in?" Burnstedt's tone begged for reassurance. Under the deep burn of his skin his face had gone white; his eyes, staring at the sergeant, were imploring.

Sergeant Potter said nothing for the moment and chewed in methodical deliberation as he rode. He had in mind the forked scar that he could have seen

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on the back of Burnstedt's neck if he wanted to look.

It made him uncomfortable to remember that scar. Burnstedt had garnered it down Hachita way two years ago, from a Comanche's lancehead. He'd taken it while going after a big devil who had Sergeant Potter on the ground.

The sergeant spat. It was deplorable to see a fine soldier and a brave man go to pieces like this. It was a sad thing too. But sentiment was not a quality the Army condoned and he could not muster it now, even had he the will. He flicked a whining insect from the ear of his horse and his words were quiet-spoken and shrewd.

"I'm thinking I don't blame you for wanting to settle down. You've served a good hitch, Burnstedt, and speaking for B Company, we're proud of your record with us. And we're proud that you're leaving with no blemish to hang on the company's fine name.

"I don't guess I'd tolerate a man's leaving no other way. I reckon should it come to it I'd put a bullet into a B trooper who checked out with his back to the devils, no matter his previous record. I guess you would too."

PRIVATES Carlson and Crispin rode abreast at the tail end of the column. Carlson was having a difficult time with the body of Sergeant Crispin, lashed in front of him. The body had stiffened and now bumped up and down methodically with every motion of the horse. He wished he had curbed his desire to prove himself a seasoned veteran and had let someone else volunteer for the job of carting the dead man.

Bowie Crispin never once glanced at the body of his brother. He concentrated his gaze on the figure of Lieutenant Reardon at the column's head.

The only pleasure left to him had been the awed and respectful attitude he had elicited from the men on informing them—and furnishing as proof the paper on which Jeff Davis had signed his commission—of his rank as captain up to and including the battle of Shiloh.

But the darkness of his one secret was no longer his alone; Lieutenant Reardon was in possession of it and Reardon, being a failure as an officer himself, would speak it out for pure vengeance before he departed.

Crispin unslung his canteen, unscrewed the cap and gulped the hot, foul-tasting water. If only Deesohay were giving real chase to the retreating column and another pitched battle occurred; a dead lieutenant would not be unusual and no one would bother to ascertain whether arrow, lance, Henry rifle, or a bullet from a U. S. Military Model carbine had been the agent of his death. . . .

*

When the intolerable heat of the morning had given over to the blistering afternoon's burn, the column stopped once, for the men to make a meal from their limited rations, and then moved on, not having halted more than fifteen minutes.

Once Jerry Kitchen dropped back to trot his horse beside Reardon.

"We're making purty good time this way, Johnny."

Reardon returned Jerry's steady gaze.

"Too good?"

The scout shook his head and his golden curls twinkled in the sun.

"I ain't able to say for sure."

Lieutenant St. John spurred up.

"What are you two discussing? I'll appreciate your not excluding me from consultations."

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Jerry Kitchen wet his finger and stroked his beautiful mustache.

"We was discussing varmints, Lieutenant."

"Vermin, you mean? Indians?"

"They's all kinds of varmints."

Under the scout's level gaze St. John colored. He cleared his throat.

"I must request that I be included in any discussions of military procedure."

"You will be, Dennis," Reardon said.

St. John's glance was impersonal.

"It's embarrassing but wise to remind you of the results of not including me the last time. You have only to recollect what occurred in the Pass."

"I know, Dennis."

Jerry Kitchen said, "Hell," under his breath and moved his horse ahead. St. John dropped back and after that they rode in silence.

THE column was moving slowly as the sun was pulled down in the west, animals and men weary to the point of exhaustion after nearly four days of constant movement. Layers of lavender and orange light sheathed the tableland which, late that afternoon, had taken the place of the desert.

Private Burnstedt rode up to report that so far nothing had been spotted by him or Sergeant Potter. He said it with grinning relief, and dropped back.

Reardon breasted Jerry Kitchen, said quietly:

"Nothing, Jerry. No sign."

"No sign, my granny." The scout laughed succinctly.

"What do you mean?"

Jerry jerked his elbow to indicate a spot far behind and oblique to the column, back in the lavender of the desert.

"Smoke," he said. "All afternoon."

"I saw that. I thought it heat waves. Looked too shimmering."

"Heat waves don't spell out Tonto —unless Indians got the heat waves workin' for 'em."

Johnny Reardon permitted a slight grin to crack the alkali on his dry lips. Tonto Buttes was the name of the section of tableland through which the column was passing. For the first time in longer than he liked to remember he felt something akin to elation in his chest.

"Maybe it's going to be all right," he said.

"Maybe."

"Jerry, I kind of feel like a traitor. They never taught boomerang strategy at the Point."

"Point?"

"West Point."

"That was your school, wasn't it?"

"Military academy."

"I don't like it."

"You never saw it."

"Smoke. Not a mite good. Have you figgered why the smoke? Them four devils hightailed it back to Deesohay, nat'rally, and reported where we was headed. Sure'n good. That's Indian sense. Well, why, if he knows where we're headed, does he have to telegraph it around?"

Reardon frowned. He felt his elation ebb, the old heaviness return. "I don't like to think why," he said quietly.

CHAPTER IV

AN INDIAN'S MIND

THE sun was down and it was nearly dark when the detail came over a sloping rim and on to the Owen ranch. It did not deserve the name ranch; it consisted merely of a single 'dobe house and a long low stable, a large empty corral yard fenced by low walls of stones and baked mud, forming a sort of compound.

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A girl appeared in the doorway. Though she was hard to discern in the dusk, the pulse in Lieutenant Reardon's throat began to beat more quickly.

But he did not go at once to Angela Owen. St. John had already spurred forward and dismounted, handing his horse's reins to his striker, and doffing his hat to the girl. They went inside together.

Reardon saw to the preparations made to bivouac for the night in the yard. He detailed two sentries to patrol the four low walls and arranged for them to be relieved; he saw to it that the farrier sergeant and his squad took over the horses, watered, fed, stabled and rubbed them down. He had the grumbling men look to their carbines.

Sergeant Potter saluted.

"The men want to know if they can light fires, sir. They'd like it fine to feel something hot in their bellies again. And they want to know can they have a mite of water in buckets from the hole so's they can scrape this lice-bit dirt off'n their faces. I told 'em I'd be asking you, sir."

Reardon looked wearily about the yard.

"Jerry," he called. "Jerry Kitchen, where are you?"

The scout was attending personally to his beloved Daisy. He came over from the stable, a currycomb in his hand.

"Jerry, the men want to cook. I don't think they ought to have a large fire."

The scout turned and looked back in the direction of the desert. He brushed at his lovely yellow mustache with the currycomb.

"Let 'em have two small fires and keep 'em both low. Might even hold a blanket over each as it'll be too dark for smoke to be spotted." He headed back to the stable to resume his grooming of Daisy.

"You heard Jerry, Sergeant. Tell the men to take turns at the fires. No crowding. No unnecessary noise. As for the water, that's scarce around here. Without permission I wouldn't—"

"I allow six-eight buckets ain't gonna dry us out no more'n we already be," a voice said.

It was Bill Owen, Angela's grandfather. He grinned at Reardon and spat. "Go ahead, Johnny. I reckon we're that glad to see ye and yer sojers —six-eight buckets worth."

"Sergeant, six buckets. That will have to do. No more."

"Yes, sir." Sergeant Potter hurried off, his big voice bawling.

"Hello, Bill," Reardon said, extending his hand. "Miss Angela all right?"

"Well, no more'n ye'd expect. She appears right smart glad to see that man o' yourn, though."

"St. John is my superior. I'm his man." It seemed pointless to say it, but there it was.

"Is that so? Course he is. I forgot."

"You didn't forget."

"No. I reckon not. Like to, though."

Bill Owen didn't look like her grandfather. He looked as if he might be her older brother, for that's the way this country seasoned a man. You stayed here with the sun and the scorching air and the baked soil and all of a sudden you became an old man; or you acclimated yourself and grew as the country grew, slowly and imperceptibly, with no trace of age.

But only a few could do it. Bill was one. And Absalom Owen had been another.

"I'll go in now and pay my respects," Reardon said.

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"H'ep yerself. Ye're welcome here far's I'm concerned, Johnny, which don't carry much weight. It was Absalom's ranch, an' now it's her'n." Bill Owen moved his long lean body and sauntered in and about the various groups of troopers, inspecting them with an old man's harmless curiosity.

THE interior of the 'dobe was bare. A rough table and a few chairs, a small chimney and hearth. It had always been like this. Absalom had never permitted her to fix it up, never intending to make this their permanent abode. Somehow he hadn't got around to moving and now he never would.

Ordinarily they used candles to conserve precious oil; now she had the lamp on the table and its brighter light served only to accentuate the room's bareness.

St. John had taken off his gauntlets and folded them meticulously over his saber belt, cleared his saber straps from the skirts of his coat and hung his hat on the back of the chair. He did everything with neat precision.

He had drawn the chair up to the table and already was eating from the steaming plate she had put before him. His black hair glistened in the light; he had washed and his fresh-faced youthfulness was apparent under the new red burn of his skin.

He was nice-looking; a typical clean-featured West Pointer. He glanced up at Reardon and said:

"You got them bivouacked all right? I-didn't think you needed help."

"They're all right."

"Posted sentries?"

Reardon smiled. "Yes. It's all attended to." His exhaustion was coming over him swiftly and he knew how dirty and unkempt he looked. It embarrassed him a little. St. John looked the part of a cavalryman. Some men were born soldiers and never had to work at it to look the part.

"I came in to pay my respects, ma'am," he said. He stood awkwardly twisting his hat. He could feel the alkali crack on his lips as he tried a cheerful smile. "And to thank you for the use of your yard."

She had been bending over the small fire. Now she straightened and carried her plate to the table. St. John got up and helped her with her chair. Now, for the first time, she looked at him.

"Thank you, Lieutenant. I'm certain it's a welcome sight any time you allow your soldiers to come here."

He winced, but could detect no intentional bitterness in her tone. He could do nothing but stare, mute as always in the presence of her loveliness.

She was golden and tall, as tall as the average man; and this was good as it forced him to keep his lean shoulders erect, something four years at the Point and three more out here hadn't accomplished for him.

She wasn't beautiful, or handsome. She was lovely. She was lovely with that rare softness which almost never was found in women of the Territory. How she had escaped the ravaging that this country wreaked on women was a mystery to him.

She had grown up here. Maybe Absalom had taught her how to protect herself; he had been wise in so many unexpected ways. But it was probably just she herself.

It hurt him, her calling him Lieutenant, and his addressing her as ma'am. Angela and John it had been before.

He looked down at his hat. "I'll be getting back to the men."

There was no answer. Looking up

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he saw St. John's lips smiling at his plate. St. John could eat with his lips closed.

She was looking with her keen direct glance at Reardon's apparel, at the powdered dust which caked his uniform and boots, at the sag of his shoulders and the tired lines etched in blue under his eyes.

For a moment her glance lingered on the ragged tear in the skirt of his coat where he'd taken a thrust of a lance. But she said nothing.

"Good night, ma'am. Dennis will tell you that although there's some cause for caution tonight, there's no real reason to be alarmed. We're here for the night."

"Yes, I know you're here. For the night. Thank you, Lieutenant."

He went to the door. Her voice, soft but impersonal and direct, stopped him.

"You'll forgive my lack of manners. I wasn't thinking. You'll have something to eat with us?"

HE TURNED almost eagerly. The smell of the food tempted him. She could do amazing things with food. He'd told her so many times.

He looked at her, and hesitated. She had merely offered victuals to a hungry soldier; nothing more. Her eyes said that. He couldn't blame her. If it weren't for him, Absalom would be sitting across from her now.

"Thank you no, ma'am. I'll be eating with the men, I reckon."

"What are they having?"

"Bacon and coffee and harbred."

"That's—that's not very appetizing, is it?"

"After cold rations it's a feast."

"I have a stew here. There's meat in it, and a vegetable."

St. John laughed. "There's no use in begging him."

She shrugged, coloring. "Lieutenant Reardon is well aware that I'm not begging him."

Reardon felt the warm redness of his own face under its tan.

"Thanks, but my striker's already prepared my rations. Thanks again."

He opened the door and St. John's voice came evenly:

"Sentries won't be enough. We'll send out a patrol later."

Without turning, "No need for a patrol, Dennis."

St. John said stiffly, "You have but to glance at your Military Tactics Manual to find that it's customary, whenever the Army is in the vicinity of the enemy, to send out reconnoitering patrols."

Reardon turned wearily.

"That's all right for Gettysburg or Antietam. Two white armies. It's different out here. Sentries are enough. It would just be dangerous for the patrol."

Her voice came very low: "You're expecting something? They've followed you?"

St. John said coldly, "I won't argue with you here. Later I'll attend to it myself."

Reardon went out into the yard, stumbling a little from his exhaustion. The smell of bacon and coffee was good but he was suddenly not very hungry. Nevertheless he ate the rations which Styles, his striker, had prepared for him.

"You better lie down, Lieutenant. You look all in." Styles' voice was anxious. "I got your blanket spread, sir, unless they got a place for you in the dobe?"

"No. I'll sleep here. Tell Sergeant Potter to take the first watch and to wake me at twelve and I'll take over."

"Yes sir." Styles made his way

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among the sprawling lumps which were the troopers, already sleeping the wooden sleep of the exhausted.

The two fires had been extinguished and the faint *clop-clop* of the horses in the stable and the murmur of the sentries were now the only sounds.

Reardon lay on the blanket, his head resting on his saddle-bag. He had thought to sleep. But the weariness in his body came suddenly alive to prod him devilishly into wakefulness.

HE COULD see the forms of the troopers around him, hear the desultory snoring which issued from under the forage caps they had tilted over their faces. Forage caps—proclaiming them veterans of the war. Not the campaign hats of the frontier troops.

That was the way it was. Not regulars—veterans of border campaigns—but veterans of another war which might have been fought in another world, knowing nothing of the way things were done out here.

He tried listening for the murmur of Angela's and St. John's voices in the 'dobe. They were probably intentionally lowering their tones and he could hear nothing. He felt once again the sharp ache in his heart. It did something to his breathing, knowing Angela was no longer for him.

For almost four years it had been an accepted conclusion at Fort Wingate that the daughter of Absalom Owen and Lieutenant John Reardon would marry. What they were waiting for, no one but Angela and Reardon could have explained.

But they had between them two words which summed it up to their own satisfaction: success and security. Never openly mentioning or admitting it to themselves, they waited for that day when he could come to her, saying, "I'm ready. I've fulfilled the mission the Army entrusted me with."

Deesohay. A lyrical name; beautiful; the refrain of an Apache hunting song.

The Scourge of the Southwest Territory, the papers in the East were wont to call him. And their descriptions of the man himself, and of his deeds, included none of the beauteous qualities of his name.

Reardon had never seen Deesohay, except momentarily from a long distance the afternoon of one scouting detail. But he knew him as a man might know his own brother; his characteristics, his habits, the manner in which his brilliant cunning struck and disappeared and struck again.

And he was aware, and not a little proud, that perhaps Deesohay knew of John Reardon.

"I'll get him, Angela. One day I'll get him. I know it. And I think perhaps he knows it."

He'd been new to the post then, fresh from the Point with the sound of bugles in his ears. After evening parade, after fatigue detail, after scout details, after most every post routine, he'd meet her. They would have something at the canteen and then walk, holding hands except when any of the enlisted men happened by. They'd been inevitable partners at all post dances.

Sometimes Absalom Owen would take his wife and daughter and small son and Absalom's father, old Bill Owen, with him on one of his vagrant wandering spells, or they'd set up a cabin in which Absalom always intended to reside permanently, but from which he inevitably returned to the post.

And always, together or apart, Angela Owen and John Reardon knew that ultimately, once he had achieved

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the carefully unmentioned goal, they would never cease being together.

But it did not work out that way.

The Point's confidence in their '64 honor man had not been misplaced. John Reardon was smarter than average, a better officer than most.

From the first it occurred to him that if Deesohay, a savage, had been able to elude regular army soldiers and West Point trained officers for years, then it was clear that the tactics employed by the regulars and Pointers were wrong. And in any army you should not think that way.

"Fight the Indian's fight," he had decided for himself. "Learn the ways of the men who have successfully combatted the savage and employ their methods. That is the only way."

And then, a week after he had confided this to Angela, Deesohay had set upon one of the Owens' temporary abodes near the Tonto.

WHEN Absalom and Angela and old Bill returned from a brief hunting trip, her mother and small brother were there on the floor awaiting them—with sightless eyes and the vacuous sagging expression of those who have been scalped. They were still alive and would have screamed incessantly with agony, except that their tongues had been removed.

Angela had groped blindly outside waiting for the sound of the two shots with which Absalom had ended the mute suffering of his wife and son.

After that, the two Owens remained close to the post for a long while. But Angela did not take kindly to John Reardon's plan of patiently out-waiting and out-maneuvering the murderer of her mother and brother. And once when he softly reminded her that it had been Absalom's fault (since no veteran Indian fighter would have been so careless as to go off and leave a woman and child alone) the tears stung her eyes and she slapped him.

Afterward it had not been quite the same. They weren't so much together and when they were there was an air of quiet reserve as if each were waiting for the other to break down.

For it was becoming known that Lieutenant Reardon was succeeding no better than his predecessors, in spite of what his friend, Jerry Kitchen, was teaching him; and that, though the casualty lists had noticeably diminished since he had taken over B's details, he would be on his way out.

Gruff, flinty old Colonel Cutter, commandant of the post, held out in favor of Reardon longer than most regular-army colonels would deem wise. But grumbling governmental reports finally moved even Paper Cutter to warn the lieutenant.

"They're sending out a new one, Johnny. A youngster. Entered the Point as you came out, I believe. St. John by name. Nothing I can do. Wish there were. Dammit, your way might be the logical way but it's not the Army way.

"Results, Johnny. That's what I put in dispatches. And I haven't been able to put 'em in. Because there haven't been any. A fact. Don't look at me that way. How can I write headquarters that every time you've had a little brush with the devils you've hightailed it back to the post by way of Tonto Buttes? Sound silly, wouldn't it?"

"It will work, sir. One of these days."

"You no longer have one of these days. It should have worked before. If it were going to. Now it's too late. Expecting St. John out in a few weeks. He'll be another green hand filled with

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the spirit of West Point and the United States Army over all. And no damn' use to us in this country. That's the way it is. You know it. I'll be sorry to lose you, Johnny. Miss you."

And old Paper Cutter had meant it. But there was nothing he could do in the face of orders from Headquarters.

The imminence of Reardon's relief from active duty had served to bridge the gap between himself and Angela. It smoothed out the quiet reserve. It brought her to his arms, her eyes wet, in the two-room 'dobe behind Enlisted Men's Row.

IT BROUGHT them together, closer than before, but only for a brief moment. Because within the next week the gap between their hearts was opened so wide it was plain there could never be anything for them again.

Absalom Owen had found the water hole in Tonto Buttes to his liking, and built himself a small 'dobe there despite the warnings of the post. He knew Indians, he said. There would be nothing on his place to interest an Indian.

And there he and his father and daughter were when John Reardon led out a routine detail to verify a report of Deesohay's presence somewhere in the vicinity.

He had begged them, while the column stopped for water, to leave. But Absalom had refused.

"That's what you and your troopers are here for, son. Protection. That makes us civilians safe to pursue our private enterprises. Mine's a bit of ranching soon's I get this place dressed up. Leave a couple of your soldiers here until you come back. That'll be all we need, son."

But he couldn't do that. Beside the army regulation of never splitting a detail, there was his patient plan of four years' making.

"John, John, what's a plan besides human lives?" Angela had cried softly to him. "Will your plan fare better with our deaths to help it?"

And he had replied that it wasn't preventing three deaths alone that his plan had been builded for. It was to prevent thousands and thousands each year.

She saw the logic of his reason and was quiet. And kissed him, going into his arms oblivious of all, the firm outlines of her tall body flattening against him, her head flung back.

"God bless you," she whispered. "I hope you will always be right, John. I believe you will."

She had never kissed him again.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Kidneys Must Remove Excess Acids

Help 15 Miles of Kidney Tubes Flush Out Poisonous Waste

If you have an excess of acids in your blood, your 15 miles of kidney tubes may be overworked. These tiny filters and tubes are working day and night to help Nature rid your system of excess acids and poisonous waste.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Kidneys may need help the same as bowels, so ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. (ADV.)

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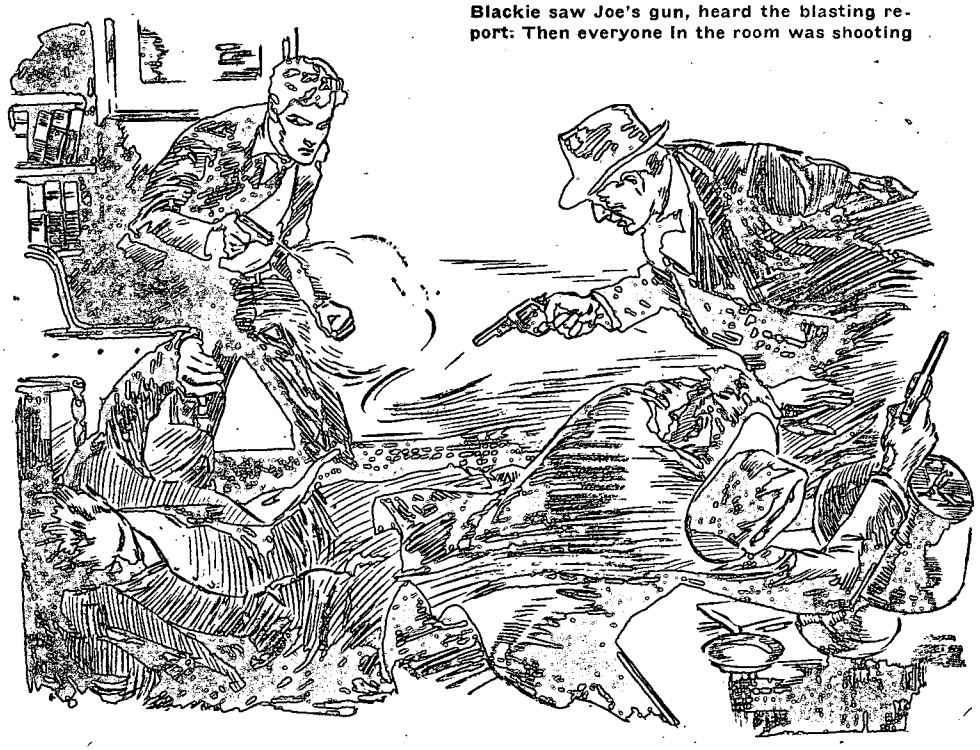

Blackie saw Joe's gun, heard the blasting report: Then everyone in the room was shooting

Second Generation

By ROBERT W. COCHRAN

Author of "Mortal Formula," "Sinew," etc.

To those who worry about the problem of youth in this melting pot of ours, we commend Blackie. He knew more of what it was all about than his old man ever guessed

BLACKIE never knew where his nickname came from. Almost all the boys he knew had nicknames, so he took it for granted that he should have one too.

His mother had died when he was hardly more than a baby; Blackie couldn't even remember her at all. But there was one large colored picture of her always hanging in the living room, and Blackie looked at it and was proud that the beautiful woman had been his mother.

He was proud of other things, too, like belonging to the boys' club and being a scout, and prouder still that he was an American. His father wasn't an American. This worried Blackie a lot. His father had been brought to this country when he was a very young boy, but he had never become a citizen.

Blackie first remembered his father when the two of them had lived alone in a little two-room tenement away over on the East Side. He had been four, and each morning his father would get up and fix breakfast for the two of them and then carry Blackie down to the floor below, where a woman with a houseful of children of her own looked after him all day.

Then in the evening Blackie's father

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would come home, clean and nice-smelling from the bakery where he worked, and take Blackie in his arms and smile at him with his even white teeth and his flashing black eyes. He didn't call him Blackie; nobody did. It was after that that someone gave him the nickname and it stuck.

"Hi, my little Niccolo!" His father would scamper up the stairs with him on his back.

Then there would be bread hot from the bakery ovens, and cold meat that his father had brought on his way home; and for Blackie there was milk to drink, while his father washed his own food down with gulps of wine that he made himself every year.

Blackie used to look often at the big picture of his mother and wish that she were there and he didn't have to stay all day with the woman on the floor below. Sometimes he thought that her big eyes were actually looking at him, and once or twice he thought that her lips curled just as if she was smiling. But he knew as he grew older that this wasn't true; yet even after that he still liked to make believe that she was actually there with him.

WHEN he was seven Blackie no longer had to stay all day with the neighbors. He went to school part of the day and the rest of the time he was free to come and go as he pleased.

He had already been nicknamed by then, and even his father called him Blackie. "When we get a lot of money, Blackie," his father used to say, "we'll go back to the old country."

Blackie didn't say anything to this, but he wasn't at all sure that he wanted to go back to the old country. Then without warning at all, Blackie's father lost his job at the bakery. It seemed funny having his father home all the time with him, just like on Sunday.

"Just for a layoff," Blackie's father explained to his friends. "Two, three weeks, a month maybe, things start right up again."

But they didn't start up in a month or even three months, and by then there were a lot of people out of work and Blackie could see that his father was really getting worried.

"What the matter with these people?" he would complain loudly whenever he had an audience. "They take a man's job, they put him on the street."

Every week he had to spend a little of the hoarded money, and as each dollar disappeared the shadows deepened in his eyes and the lines about his mouth changed his smile to a sneer.

He would sit for hours with a bottle of home-made sweet wine at his elbow; dreaming, Blackie used to think, of Italy. And always Blackie was in dread that he would decide suddenly to return.

It had been almost a year since the bakery had laid him off, and Blackie knew that the money his father had saved was almost all gone. Sometimes even he went to bed at night with a big hollow in his stomach because there was no longer bread and cold meat or a big bowl of noodles with pieces of meat stuck all through it.

His father began going out at nights and other men started coming into their room and talking with his father. The children in the neighborhood that he played with began to speak of his father with a new respect.

But it was weeks before he learned that his father had a new job. He was what the other children called a runner, but Blackie didn't know what a runner was, and one night he asked his father when he saw him getting ready to go out.

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"Joe"—he had called him Joe for a long time—"what's a runner?"

"You keep your mouth shut," Joe said savagely. Then in more friendly tone, "A guy's got to eat, a guy's got to have shoes to wear."

Blackie didn't ask his father again, but he kept his eyes and ears open and pretty soon he knew that his father drove a beer truck. He carried a gun, too, and he left for work after dark and was usually back by daylight. There was money now and food, plenty of it. Blackie even had dimes and quarters to spend when he wanted to ask Joe for them.

But Joe slept during the day with the gun under his pillow and the door was locked in the afternoons when Blackie came home from school. Once a policeman in uniform stopped him in the hallway of the tenement building and said, "You're Joe Martelli's boy, aren't you?"

Blackie admitted that he was, and heard the door to their room open very softly. He could picture Joe standing there in his underwear listening, maybe with the gun in his hand.

"Tell Joe he's riding for a fall," the officer said, and went on out to the street.

Blackie raced up the stairs, and sure enough Joe was there with the door open, waiting for him. Joe hit him once on the head with the flat of his hand. It was the first time Joe had ever hit him and Blackie was stunned not so much by the blow as by the unexpectedness.

"What you tell John Law, huh?" Joe stared down at him, no sign of laughter in his eyes now.

"I didn't tell him nothing, Joe. He asked me was I your kid and I said yeah." Joe put the gun down and Blackie continued because he felt that it was his duty. "He said you're riding for a fall."

IT WASN'T long after that when they moved. It was a new neighborhood, strange kids. There was better furniture, and the only way you could get up or down was in the elevator. A woman came in now each morning and cleaned their rooms and sometimes she stayed and cooked dinner.

It was summer and Blackie wasn't going to school. He was nine years old, and the only time that he wasn't happy was when he looked up at the picture of his mother which Joe had brought with them when they moved. She never smiled at him now, and of course he knew by then that she never had really.

Joe wasn't the same either. He still talked of going back to the old country; but where before he had spoken of hundreds of dollars, he now spoke of thousands.

He bought an automobile, and Blackie would see him sometimes at the wheel. He was never alone; there was always one man or more with him. Hard, tight-lipped men, the same as Joe.

Blackie found the boys' club that winter. Saturday afternoons and evenings he could go there. He had told them his name, and the man in charge had looked hurriedly around when he had said, "Joe Martelli's my father."

But they let him come, and once when they wanted to collect money for a billiard table for the basement he had asked Joe for the money. "How much you want, kid?" Joe asked casually.

"Ten dollars," Blackie said, not being at all sure how much would be needed.

"Hell, you can't get a table for that; here's fifty."

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Blackie took the money to the man he had first talked to. "I asked Joe for some money for the billiard table. He gave me this." Blackie was proud of the big bills when he handed them to the superintendent.

The man took the money and dropped it on the desk as though it burned his fingers. "You'd better take it back," he said; and then, "This is to be paid for by the boys themselves."

"So my money ain't good enough for the damn punk." Joe glared at Blackie as if it was his fault the money had been refused. "Well, you ain't goin' there no more, see. Joe's kid ain't goin' where Joe's money can't go."

Blackie tried to explain that it wasn't just Joe's money; but his heart wasn't in it, because he couldn't forget the way the man had dropped the bills when he had told him their source.

Blackie stayed away for a week, and the superintendent met him on the street one day and inquired the reason for his absence. Blackie struggled between his desire to tell the truth and loyalty to Joe.

"Joe," he said under the man's cross-questioning, "told me not to go no more."

"I don't want you to disobey your father," the superintendent said, "but you'll be welcome any time you want to come."

And after a few more days Blackie did go back. It was Christmas time, and Joe appeared far too busy to check up on whether he went or not.

ONE morning in January Joe didn't come in before school time, and that afternoon when Blackie came home from school the room was still empty. He was frightened for the first time in his life, and sat huddled in the room until after dark because he was too frightened to leave. He just waited.

He slept finally, still sitting in the chair with all his clothes on, and later during the night he was awakened by the sound of a key in the lock. He waited, holding his breath, until he recognized his father's figure against the lighted corridor. He was not alone; a man walked on either side and supported Joe's slumped body.

They eased Joe onto the bed and then one of them crossed the room and snapped the bolt on the door. "Hi y'u, Blackie?" Joe said weakly from between bloodless lips.

"Joe!" Blackie's voice sounded away off somewhere.

"Shut up," one of the men who had brought Joe in said. "He's all right. God knows why."

The next morning a man and woman came to see Joe. The man had a black bag and Blackie knew that he was a doctor, but it wasn't the doctor Joe had brought when he had the measles. The woman stayed for a week, looking after Joe, cooking their meals. Then Joe was up and around again, and in just a little while he was going out as if nothing had happened.

Blackie saw that it made a difference to the other kids, even to the superintendent at the boys' club, his being Joe Martelli's boy.

They moved again, that next summer, and this time they had a house all to themselves. That is, it was Joe's house, though there were always extra people in it. There were two cars in the garage that could be reached without going outdoors. And the men who were there called Joe "Boss", when they called him anything to his face.

There were women, too, different ones. An old wrinkled-faced woman cooked their meals and had charge of

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the house. Sometimes there were parties, and then for a day or two Joe would sit around drinking with some girl. Hardly ever the same girl twice.

Blackie wore long pants now, though he was only ten. He had found the local library and another boys' club. He could have money any time he wanted it and as much of it as he wanted.

"I'll get you a car, kid, when you're sixteen."

One thing pleased Blackie: Joe didn't talk so much about going back to the old country. Once, when he was half drunk, he took Blackie into his bedroom and after several failures opened a big safe he had had built into the wall. It look to Blackie as if the inside were half full of money, stacks and stacks of greenbacks. "When we get her full, kid, we're pulling up stakes."

THE next morning, though, he was sober, and when he was sober he didn't talk about going away. He took Blackie in the car with him out into the country. There was the driver—Joe no longer drove his own car—and another man who sat on the back seat beside them.

Joe showed him a small pistol. It had gold inlaid grips. "For you," Joe said, and Blackie's fingers trembled with excitement when at last it was in his own hands. He had never fired a gun in his life, but he was anxious now to try this.

When they had driven a few more miles Joe told the driver to stop; and they went, all four of them, and made a target of a piece of paper and stood off taking turns shooting at it.

Blackie took his turn with the others, though he was never able to hit the scrap of paper as Joe and the other men did. One of the men had a bottle that they passed around. "Give the kid a drink," Joe said.

It made him gag and tears came into his eyes, but he drank it and looked at Joe for approval. "You're Joe Martelli's kid; you remember that, see. We're going places, you and me." Blackie knew that this time Joe wasn't talking about going home to the old country.

A bird came from somewhere and sat on a limb above their heads and began to sing. "Get so you can do this," Joe said, and raised his own gun and shot once. The bird seemed to jump a little way into the air; then it fell and twisted for a moment on the ground.

Blackie said, "Joe!" in a choked-down voice, and the three men laughed.

"It wasn't hurting you," Blackie said. "It hadn't done nothing."

"Take a drink," Joe said. "Be a man, forget it."

But Blackie couldn't forget it. He thought of it that night when he was in his own bed. He had a room to himself, though Joe no longer went out every night.

. . . Blackie was twelve before he asked Joe's permission to join the Scouts. "A bunch of sissies," Joe said. "What you want to hang around with them for?"

"I like 'em," Blackie said, "and they like me. I know a lot of fellows who've joined."

"Forget it, kid," Joe said. "That ain't no racket for Joe Martelli's kid to be hooked up with."

Blackie knew from the papers now what the name Joe Martelli stood for. His mother's picture still hung in the living room of the new house, but he wondered sometimes whether she would even remember him. Hardly a week passed that he couldn't find Joe's name mentioned in the papers at least once.

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Sometimes Joe was gone from home for days and weeks, but it didn't seem to make any difference. There were always the same tight-lipped, beady-eyed men coming and going in the big house.

He got to know many of them by name, but he was always afraid of them and he couldn't get away from the feeling that they were afraid of him because he was Joe Martelli's kid.

JOE was there the night that the cop stopped him as he was entering the gate. "Just a minute, son." The officer stepped in front of him, and almost in no time at all Joe was out of the house and other men followed him.

"What's going on here?" Joe elbowed his way past Blackie to confront the officer.

"Hello, Joe." Blackie could feel the difference in the man's voice. "Don't mind if I ask the boy a question or two, do you?"

"Like hell I don't," Joe said. "That's my kid. Joe Martelli's kid, see. No one asks him questions unless I say the word." He jerked his head. "Go on in the house, Blackie."

They moved aside for him to pass and Blackie heard the officer say, "Some day, Joe, we're going to pin something on you that'll stick."

"Better bring the marines when you try it," Joe said. "If you ain't out of here in thirty seconds you're goin' to be lookin' for a job in the mornin'."

Joe followed Blackie up to his room. "I ever catch you talking to one of those mugs, I'll slap your teeth down your throat."

"What'd he want?" Blackie said. "What'd he want to know?"

"A lot o' things, maybe. Kid, I got this town eatin' out of my hand. Joe Martelli is king-pin, see. When I think of what a fool I was, grindin' ten hours a day in that bakery, and then near starvin' when I lost the lousy job, when I think of the sap I was then, I could damn near shoot myself."

"Remember," Blackie said, "we used to sleep with the door open so's to get the breeze blowing?"

"Well, ain't we got fans enough? We don't have to keep doors open. You ain't satisfied, huh? You want to be back in some stinkin' walk-up."

"We're different," Blackie said, "we're not like other people. I'm not the same as other kids; they don't even like to play with me."

"You're damn right, you ain't like other kids; you're Niccolo Martelli. All I got to do is snap my fingers and half the big shots in this town'll send their kids to play with you."

"You don't understand," Blackie said. "I don't want to be different, I want to be like other kids. I've joined the Scouts, Joe. A good Scout is a good citizen."

"You ain't lettin' 'em feed you that slop, kid? Good citizen! I'm a good citizen. I ain't never been in jail. I pay my debts."

"I'm one of what they call the second generation. My Scout master says the future of the country rests on our shoulders."

"Don't let the future of this country worry you, kid. We ain't goin' to be here. Another year . . ." He kissed his fingertips in a gesture of farewell.

SOMETHING happened, though, before that year passed. Blackie wasn't sure what it was. But Joe became more and more taciturn and ill-tempered. Once he was gone for a whole month, and Blackie saw by the papers that he was being held without bail for the grand jury.

All the trouble seemed to be caused

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by an election that had thrown out the old leaders and prosecutors.

Then Joe was back home, but he was frightened. Even Blackie could tell by his actions that he had changed. More and more men came, making demands upon him. When Blackie looked into the safe, he saw that the huge stack of money had dwindled beyond belief.

Joe called him in one night. There was just the two of them in the room. "Kid," Joe said, "they're ridin' me. I've still got one trump left, then it's you and me for Canada."

"Listen, Joe." Blackie was as near to tears as he had been in a long time. "The papers say if they pin something on you, you'll burn."

Joe laughed. It was an ugly, mean laugh, but it was the only way he ever laughed any more. "Joe Martelli burn? Not a chance, kid. There's too many in the same boat, see. If I go up the river, all these leeches I've been payin' 'll go too."

It seemed to Blackie that everyone in the house was walking on thin egg shells after that. The days dragged, a week seemed like a month. Then he heard an extra being cried on the street. Joe sent him out to buy a copy and met him at the door, grabbing the paper from his hand.

He watched Joe's eyes race across the page and heard a sigh of satisfaction. He didn't see the paper, didn't know until the following day that a baby girl had been kidnaped and was being held for ransom.

Blackie couldn't believe that this was what Joe had meant, but for days he tried to avoid Joe because he knew that deep down in his heart he hated him. There was no clue, yet; the papers said so, and the police were keeping off the case until after the child had been released.

One paper printed a statement from the baby's father. Blackie carried it in to Joe. No ransom was to be paid. It was, the father said against the principles of liberty and democracy.

"Well," Joe said, "what you showin' that to me for?"

For an instant Blackie thought that he might have been wrong after all. Then he saw Joe's eyes and knew that it was only a bluff.

"You know." Blackie said.

"You're smart, ain't you? You're Joe Martelli's kid. That stuff," he pointed to the paper, "that's newspaper talk, it don't mean a thing. He'll pay and pay plenty when the time comes."

"Joe . . ." Blackie hesitated. He could feel the little gold pistol in his pocket but he didn't know what he was going to do with it. "I'm fourteen, Joe; I'm big enough to say something."

"Say what?" Joe asked. "You keep your nose clean."

"All right." Blackie's hand rested on the smooth inlaid pistol butt; it gave him new strength. "I'm going to Mr. Grayson and tell him he can hold me till you send the kid back."

"You blasted idiot! Do you think that'll save me? You know the penalty for a snatch."

"Then send her back," Blackie said, "and I'll sail for home with you whenever you want to go."

JOE had risen and was coming slowly forward. Blackie went backward until his back was against the door. His hand came out with the small, shiny pistol. "You gave me this, Joe."

"That pea-shooter!" Joe said. "Kid, I'm going to have your hide for this."

"Joe, Joe, I'll shoot." Blackie tried to keep his voice low, but the words were loud in spite of him.

Joe stopped, wavered, then turned

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back to the chair he had quitted. "You're Niccolo Martelli, all right. Kid, there's a man sittin' up there with a gun on you. You never knew that, did you? Oh, Joe's got a lot of tricks up his sleeve."

Blackie saw that a picture had moved on the wall and a man's eye glinted above a gun barrel. "Shoot," he said, "Go on, shoot, I'm not afraid to die."

"O. K., Chick," Joe said, and waved a dismissal. "I'll talk to the kid"

"I'm not fooling," Blackie said. "I can be there in thirty minutes."

Joe sat motionless so long Blackie shifted on his feet nervously. At last Joe spoke. "We'll play it your way," he said, and picked a phone from the table.

There was no answer. After a minute of waiting he replaced it and tried the second one. "Wire's dead," he said hoarsely.

Blackie felt the door move at his back and at the same moment the man's eye and gun barrel filled the hole high in the wall opposite. He felt the weight increase behind the door and was swept forward. He staggered to regain his balance.

Joe, his face livid, was on his feet, gun in hand. "Take it easy, Joe," one of the two men who had entered said. "You're not crossing us up."

"I'm still boss," Joe said. "What I say goes, Curley."

"Not no more it doesn't," Curley said. "The kid's making you soft. We're all in this up to our necks."

"Get out, Blackie," Joe said.

"Blackie stays. Keep 'em covered, Chick, I'll collect their hardware."

Blackie didn't see Joe aim the gun in his hand but he heard the blasting report in the closed room, and then everyone was shooting. Blackie fired once at the spot in the opposite wall and felt the little pistol torn from his fingers as a bullet struck it. Then Joe was lying on the floor clicking an empty gun. Blackie bent over him as feet sounded on the stairs.

"It's all right, kid," Joe said, "I guess— I . . ."

The papers carried a picture of Blackie that night. "Hero," they called him. "This, the second generation, knows already more of liberty and democracy than it was ever possible to teach the parents . . ."

"Grayson's daughter was all right," Blackie said to the Scout master who had come in to see him. "She wasn't hurt a bit, just scared. And Joe—well, Joe was all right too, at the end."

"You bet he was," the man said. "He must have been proud of you there at the last."

USE SPEEDWAY DE LUXE BLADES
FOR FAST, SMOOTH, ECONOMICAL SHAVES

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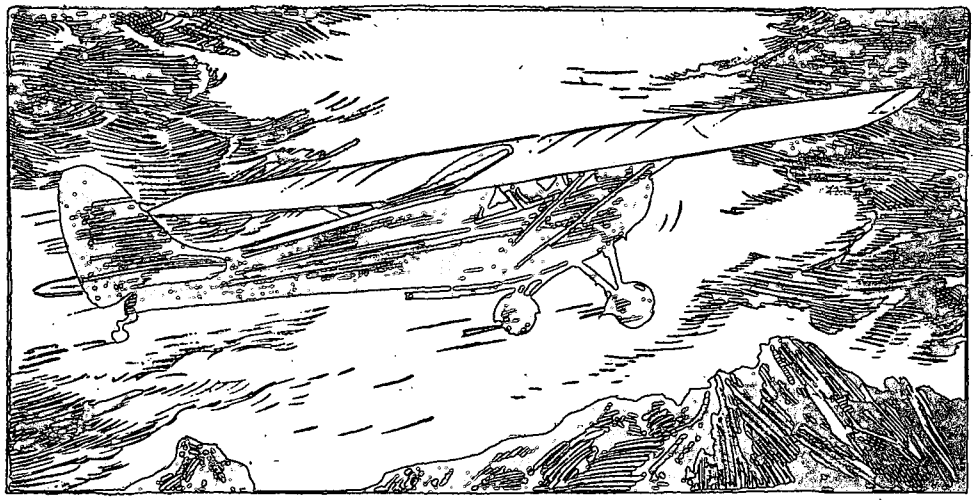

Gold in the Sky

By LOUIS C. GOLDSMITH

Author of "Black Sky Before Sunset," "Medals for Madmen," etc.

Compadres, we three are men who laugh at misery. What need have we of food and drink, if we have dynamite and steel? So to work! Tonight we will tear the heart out of Mexico to find gold

Complete Short Novel

CHAPTER I

THE LOST VIEW

THE trouble in Jennings' mine started with a serious cave-in on the eight-hundred-foot level and subsequent loss of the main ore vein; the vein made Jennings' Mexican holding worth something like two million pesos.

The trouble between Tobiah Wayne, airplane pilot, and Frederick Werner, owner of the diamond drill rig, started over a yellow, clothbound book, worth not more than two dollars at the nearest States bookstore. That and a pinto cayuse with a cross-grained sense of humor.

Off-hand it would seem there could be no possible connection between the two troubles. . . .

o

Tobiah Wayne sprawled comfortably on the big, homemade veranda couch of the mine residence, a book in his hand, his tanned, homely face screwed up in lines of studious concentration. With Toby sitting in it, the couch lost its size. Toby was big enough to dwarf any ordinary piece of furniture.

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The front screen door banged. Riding boots clipped briskly over the tiled floor. "Ignacio!" The call was imperious, in Spanish. "My horse, please!"

"Si, señorita. Presto."

There was a pause. Toby bent closer to his book, feeling Roberta Jennings' eyes on him.

"And Ignacio, you will bring another horse. El Pinturo, the tame one. Make the stirrup leather very long, Ignacio."

Toby squirmed a little in his seat, still pretending to read. But, for his eyes, there was no print on the page. There was the image of a lithe, boyish form, dressed in picturesque, gold-braided *charro* riding clothes; a felt, flat-brimmed sombrero slanted rakishly over thick, smooth coils of honey-gold hair, eye brows black and shapely above deeply azure eyes; lips red, provocative.

A sharp tap of her riding whip closed the book. She had tiptoed over to stand before him. "Why do you and Mr. Werner eat up such . . . such *golpear?*" she demanded. "Sickly love stories?"

Toby's grin stopped her. "You may know what Mr. Werner reads," he drawled. "But this's about ore mining."

"Mining? But the cover!"

Toby continued to grin, as confusion warmed her cheeks. Sometimes Roberta Jennings was a girl of sixteen. Sometimes she had the cool poise of thirty. Perhaps this was the Latin heritage from her Spanish mother. But at all times and all moods, Toby considered her the most exciting, the most desirable person in the world.

"Lots of yellow-covered books," he observed. "Maybe I should get one about love."

Exhausted, they blasted again, and stumbled blindly to escape the flying rock

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"Excellent," she retorted. "Love or mining—you understand little of either. But if you would know of mining, ask my father. He is the best mining engineer in the world."

Toby considered this thoughtfully. "Maybe," he allowed.

"You doubt it!" There was real anger in her voice now.

"Well, not that exactly, Bobicito. Only . . . well, he hasn't found that lost vein."

"Oh, that!" she shrugged disdainfully.

Toby frowned. "It's more serious than you realize. Listen, Bobicito!"

IT WAS like the ticking of a clock, scarcely noticeable because of its monontonous regularity. She didn't understand, until he moved his hand in cadence to the muffled *thump . . . thump . . . thump.*

"The stamps?" she questioned, puzzled.

He nodded. "The mill stamps, crushing low-grade ore that hardly pays for steam to run them. Just to keep the mine peons busy. I haven't flown a brick a brick of pay metal in three months, Bobby."

"Your salary goes on," she reminded him. "Mr. Werner will soon find the vein, with his diamond drill."

"He'd better," Toby grumbled. "That cave-in cost your dad a small fortune. And Werner's charging plenty for his drill work. D'you know how much it cost for that new diamond bit I flew in from Guaymas? D'you know how much the airmail postage alone, was?"

The girl sat down on the couch arm, facing him, spurred riding boots on the buckskin lacing of its seat. "So," she charged, "you read a book, to tell my father, who is the best mining engineer in the world, how he should find that lost vein. Poof! Such things often happen in mining.

"It is you do not understand, Don Toby. That you think I am the most beautiful woman in the world, that you love me madly—that is the important thing. Isn't it true? Speak, now, sober one!"

Toby Wayne's face was sober enough. "Let's get things straight, Bobby," he said. "All I own in this world is that cargo plane, up on the mesa. I fly concentrates and brick gold for your dad, because it's the best and safest way to move it. You've all treated me fine; just like one of the family. I'm not going to take advantage of that."

"But, Toby . . ."

"Now wait a minute. Your dad has a funny idea about airplane pilots. Like acrobats . . . tight-rope walkers. Well, my father was a grading contractor. I was raised in a construction camp. I'm a darned good powder monkey. I know how to move dirt and rock—above ground.

"Maybe I can learn how to do it underground. Anyway, I'll learn enough so your dad'll talk to me like a grown-up man. He's in a tight corner, Bobby. A damned tight corner."

Her mood had changed. "Thank you for the nice lecture, Mr. Wayne," she said coolly. "Now I will ride up and talk with Señor Herr Werner—perhaps about the love book he is reading. Who knows? He has the nice, stiff Prussian bow which would make any girl's heart beat faster."

"What's the other nag for? The pinto?"

She made the Spanish shrug a thing adorable. "Perhaps Señor Werner and I will ride."

Toby came to his feet, spoke savagely. "You will not. That milky-eyed

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caballero is a little too smooth with his bows and hand kissing." Toby caught up to her with long strides.

"But you are afraid of horses!"

"That was a joke. I said I'd rather bail out with a parachute than—here, Ignacio, let's have those control lines."

"The stirrup, *señor*. You hold it thus for the foot."

"*Dios,*" Roberta murmured piously. "There is an old Mexican vaquero saying that 'the sepulcher of an unsure rider is always open.' I commend you to God, *señor.*"

Toby swung into the saddle, his right foot fumbling angrily for stirrup.

"But there is no need to fear," Roberta told him demurely. "El Pinturo is very tame, like the plow horse."

This talk of fear nettled Toby, in his present humor. "I'll ride anything you've got on the place," he snapped. They were mounting a small rise in the trail. "You act as though riding was some extraordinary accomplishment."

"A good rider shifts weight forward to help his mount in climbing. But you will learn—perhaps."

TOBY knew she was laughing at him; knew he was foolish to be annoyed. But the enforced idleness of the last few weeks had given him a feeling of uselessness. Bob Jennings would talk to him seriously about unimportant things like hunting or fishing. But mention the mine and he shut up like a clam.

And Frederick Werner had for him an insolent condescension that kept Toby in sullen anger whenever the big, blondly handsome drill man was about.

The pinto broke into a comfortable jog when they reached level mesa ground. At least it would have been comfortable to any horseman of experience.

"But, Toby," Roberta called, gaily. "I can see the sky under your pants' seat. Is that the way a brave Americano rides his—" Her laughter abruptly stopped.

A group of *mozos,* coming from the nearby drill rig, stood at the trail's edge. Fun, at the expense of another American's dignity, is not shared with the natives.

Toby's good humor was returning by the time they reached the drill rig. Frederick Werner advanced a few steps to meet them, holding a yellow-bound book in his hand.

At sight of the book Toby's pinto gave a snort of simulated fright, Werner smiled, waved the book in front of the horse's nose, as though in greeting to them. The pinto reared; whirled abruptly. Toby, completely unprepared, continued the original course, outflung hands easing his fall in the bunched thorns of a Spanish dagger plant.

Werner's laughter brought Toby to his feet in a cold fury. The other was directing his crew's attention to this American's awkwardness.

"Very, very funny," Toby said, and swung savagely with his open right hand.

Werner, his mouth still wide with his laughter, found himself on the ground. His *mozos* seemed equally delighted with this turn of the comedy.

Werner got up, murder gleaming in his pale eyes. "For that insult I challenge—"

Bob Jennings, who had witnessed all this from the other side of the drill rig, came running at the first move of trouble. He was between the two men now, his voice level. "That's enough! Both of you. Don't say things you'll be sorry for."

"You take sides with him?" Werner demanded. "After he deliberately struck me before these filthy natives?"

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Jennings was conciliatory. "It's about even up, Frederick. You scared his horse; intentionally or otherwise. And he knocked you down. Come on. Shake hands and forget it."

Jennings said the last with assurance. He was used to having his orders obeyed.

Toby, already ashamed of his quick anger, was smiling apologetically. But there was no smile on the Prussian's square, arrogant face. "Very well, Mr. Jennings. You brought this on yourself."

"Brought what?" the mine owner asked, not understanding.

"Just this. My drill machinery has already been spoken for by a number of mines. It is the only one you or they can get, at present. You already owe me a large sum for work done. I will want that money immediately and my charges from now on will be double what they were."

Jennings' face went white. "You know very well this mine's worth a thousand times anything I'd owe you, if you drilled from now forever."

Werner's lips curled. "I know that if you don't find that lost vein it won't be worth a thousand dollars."

There was a startled gasp. Toby saw color drain from Roberta's face.

Jennings was striving desperately to restrain his anger, to keep this conversation on a reasonable level. "The work you've done for me so far, Werner, hasn't been worth a nickel. You know that."

Werner shrugged. "It is not my concern. You retained the services of Mr. Williams, the American geologist in Guaymas. He mapped out the exploration area, with detailed instructions to me. I have followed those instructions. You are aware of that, having watched my work very, very carefully."

"You think I've been spying on you?" Jennings asked. "You can't blame me for a careful check on work this important."

The drill man bowed stiffly, from the waist. "That question comes readily to your mind," he said. "However that is, I will expect my money within a few days; as soon as that blundering fool can fly it up from Guaymas." He turned back to his loitering crew, signaling for them to resume work.

JENNINGS stood with an unnatural pose of uncertainty, his gray face devoid of expression. Toby felt a great pity for this hardheaded little mining man who had come down into Mexico years before and given the best part of his life to developing this mine. Now, it seemed, he might lose the mine.

Jennings turned and started slowly toward the residence. Roberta followed and dismounted to walk beside him in silence.

Toby found the mine owner on the veranda, staring listlessly at the encircling wall of mountains. He found difficulty choosing his words. "Mr. Jennings," he said finally, "I started this trouble. If you think it will do any good for me to apologize to that—to Werner, I am prepared to do it."

Jennings looked up; for a moment he seemed not to have heard. He shook his head after that short pause. "Why, no, Toby. It wasn't your fault. I saw him flourish that bright-colored book to scare your horse. I'd have done exactly what you did."

Toby had a warm feeling of relief. It was short lived. "But he's got you over a barrel, hasn't he?"

Jennings spoke slowly, after a thoughtful pause. "Well not exactly. I've always paid my bills. There's no reason why a bank won't loan money on

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mine property worth—at least it was once considered valuable property." Jennings smiled. "Anyway, I can sell for a whole lot more than the thousand dollars that Werner suggested."

Roberta stood at the door. "But you wouldn't think of selling it, Dad!"

Jennings lifted his face. "Would you mind so much, Bobby?" His voice sounded strangely weary.

There was a quaver in the girl's voice: "Sell our mine, Dad! Why it's unthinkable. It would be like selling—"

"Forget it, Bobicito!" Bob Jennings' voice had regained its crispness. "Of course we won't sell. Now listen. We've still got time for Toby to fly us down to Guaymas.

"I'll get everything fixed up there in a few minutes. Just a matter of stopping in at the bank. Then we'll all go to a show. So hurry up and get out of that monkey suit."

Toby Wayne threw a few over-night things into his traveling bag and, following orders from the mine owner, went to their small assay building to get the last core samples from Werner's drilling. These round sticks of rock, chewed out by the churning, twisting diamond teeth of the hollow drill, were all carefully labeled as to depth and chart location. In places, thin sections of the rock cylinders had been sawed out to be assayed for values.

The geologists would be interested more in the rock's structure than in metal content. Studying these—a cross-section of the mountain—he should be able to tell what had happened many centuries before to make that rich ore vein drop out of sight.

Bundling these samples up in the heavy brown paper they used for wrapping gold-silver bullion, Toby left for the mesa airfield.

He started the motor of his big high-wing Norford. A smile very near to contentment came to his lips as the mountains re-echoed that deep-throated song of power.

Presently a man came toward him at a dog trot, carrying something in his hand. Toby recognized Felipe Toribio, half-bred *jefecito* of Werner's drill crew. The man motioned with his free hand and Toby cut the throttle so he could get past the propeller blast.

"Señor Werner told me to give these to Señor Jennings for mailing," he said, in Spanish.

Toby accepted the three letters and a package. Toribio indicated this. "It is a book that was loaned to Señor Werner by Señor Esteban. He will call for it at Guaymas."

Toby knew Esteban, a dandified little *mestizo* who ran a travel agency in Guaymas. He nodded to Toribio and put the things in his chart rack.

After the other was gone, Toby thoughtfully examined the letters. One was addressed to a Gertrudis somebody, in Guaymas. The other two to women in Mexico City.

"Quite the ladies' man," Toby muttered, shaking the letters. He stripped the book of its wrapping. It was the same one that had frightened his horse. *Crimson Passion,* was the title. He shook the book, as he had the letters, fanning the leaves. Nothing fell out. He shoved it into the chart rack.

"Crimson Passion," he repeated. "I'll bet he's got a lot of those postcards you can't send through the mail."

Bob Jennings came into the ship's cabin.

"Where's Roberta?" Toby inquired.

"The kid's little upset," Jennings replied. "Didn't want to come."

Toby was silent, keeping his disappointment to himself. He had looked forward to having her along.

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CHAPTER II

DOUBLE FAULT IN GOLD

JENNINGS sat beside Toby, on the folding jump-seat, while they took off and swung in a big circle for altitude. The mine was completely walled in by mountains. There was only one practical trail out. Before Toby came to the mine all the pay metal had been carried by burro trains, two of the seventy-five-pound transport bricks on each side of special pack saddles, fifty armed men to guard the gold, and a three-week trip to the nearest railroad.

At ten thousand altitude Toby leveled off and set on an airline course for Guaymas. There was nothing much to do now but keep a sharp eye on panel instruments and hold the compass course.

"This Frederick Werner," he began, "do you trust him very far, Bob?"

Jennings roused himself from staring at the raw, gashed ranges of the Sierra Madres, below them. Toby saw a frown come to his face, his lips tighten. "As far as my mine is concerned," he replied, raising his voice above the outside motor noise, "I don't trust anybody very far.

"I don't have to," he added. "I'm a States mining engineer and we know as much about the business as any of them." A quizzical smile replaced the frown. He got up and went back to the small passenger section, forward of the big freight compartment.

Toby had already sensed the stubborn pride Jennings had in his work. He knew that advice on that subject only antagonized him. Nevertheless, Toby had some thoughts he considered worth discussing.

Jennings came forward with the book on ore mining Toby had been reading that morning. "Roberta thought you might want something to study," he said, smiling. "You going to be a mining engineer, Toby?"

Toby wondered if she had sent the book as a jest or a challenge. She shared so completely her father's pride and confidence in his ability. Toby put the book in the rack beside him. "About Werner," he started again. "Is there any way he could doublecross you in this drilling?"

"What way?" Jennings asked.

Toby shrugged. "You'd know more about that than I would."

"Possibly," Jennings admitted, with sarcasm.

Toby pushed on with his own stubbornness. "I'm just giving you some ideas that occurred to me. For one thing, he might purposely drill so as to miss that vein—try to convince you it was entirely lost."

"That's just possible," Jennings admitted, a smile hovering on his lips. "So then?"

Toby controlled a small, growing anger. "That's obvious. If he can convince you there's only low-grade ore in the mine, he might buy it for little or nothing."

"Toby, do I look that simple? In the first place Werner hasn't money enough to buy the picks and shovels in that mine. I happen to know his drill rig's mortgaged to the hilt. Werner likes his card games and women too well."

"He might get the money."

"No chance, Toby. Nobody trusts him. He'd have to show pay metal and lots of it before anybody'd loan him a cent. He's been in too many shady deals." Jennings had the air of talking to a small boy. "Any more bright ideas, Toby?"

Toby controlled his anger. "Bob, you think I'm an empty-head, don't you? About half grown up?"

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"You're a little young," Jennings conceded. "But you've never heard me question your flying judgment.

"In other words," Toby flared, "I'd better stick with my own job and let your business alone."

"Not a bad idea," Jennings said tersely. Then his face softened. He put a hand on the big flyer's shoulder. "Let's don't fight, son. There're a lot of trick to my trade. But I think I know most of them. Anyway, all those you'd think of. You come with me to Frank Williams when we get in. Maybe you'll learn some answers.

"He's the geologist? It's a wonder to me you feel the need of one!"

"I wouldn't if I had his equipment," Jennings returned, antagonism again in his voice.

IN THAT mood they arrived at the Guaymas airfield. Toby cut his switches and followed Jennings out of the ship. There was no need to cool an engine down by idling, with outside temperature well above the hundred mark.

"You have a package for me, *señor?*"

Toby recognized the little *mestizo,* Esteban. "That's right," he admitted and went back into the control cab for the book. "You might mail these for me," he requested, giving him Werner's letters with the book.

"Those letters," Toby said, getting into a city-bound taxi with Jennings, "were for his girl friends—all of them."

Jennings chuckled, with a return of good humor. "Toby, you're the limit. If one of those had been addressed to a bank, or to somebody you knew had money, I'll bet you'd have steamed it open."

Toby nodded slowly. "I'd have done just that, Bob."

"For your peace of mind," Jennings offered, "nobody'd loan Werner any money on his own say-so. He'd have to show 'em colors. I mean, something definite in real gold ore. Further than that, if Werner offered me a million dollars cash, I wouldn't sell to him. It just wouldn't be good business, even though I've watched his drill operations like a hawk."

That seemed to cover the possibilities of any treachery from the drill man. But Jennings had further proof of his ability to take care of himself, when they got to the dusty little office of Frank Williams, consulting engineer and geologist. From that short, stocky little man, with the bald, sunburned pate and the shrewd little eyes Toby got more information about mountains and their habits than he could digest in a month's time.

He and Jennings went over the exploration chart, where each drill hole was accurately scaled and marked as to horizontal location and depth.

"You're sure he's drilling plumb?" Williams questioned, with his short, choppy way of talking. "Small matter, Bob, but it's just possible that he might dodge the vein that way." This question was the outcome of a long, technical discussion, most of which was beyond Toby's mental reach.

Jennings shook his head. "I've checked every damned hole, Frank."

"And the survey?"

"Checked also. More than that, Frank, I had him put a hole down to cut the drift tunnel. Checked the grass-level survey from that, and it fits to a tenth."

Williams swabbed his bald pate spot with a faded bandanna handkerchief. "Damn it, Bob, the vein side of that mountain faulted downward! I said that from the first. The same fault line runs for miles through there. But as further

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proof I airmailed a core sample to New York for grinding and microscopic study. The structure strain was downward."

"But you worked on that theory, Frank! Werner's explored practically every foot of it."

Williams took a deep breath, pushed the charts and reports to one side of his desk. Toby found himself thoroughly liking and trusting the stubby little man. "Bob," Willliams said, "let's go out and have a drink."

Without knowing just why it was, Toby felt an uncomfortable tenseness in the room.

Bob Jennings cleared his throat. "I can stand and take it, Frank. I don't need any whisky in my belly. Shoot the works."

"Well, Bob," Williams said, kindly, "you've probably guessed it already. There's not much I can tell you about mining. From these reports and from Werner's drilling there's only one answer. You've got a double fault, or worse. That mountain seems to have tied itself into a bowknot."

JENNINGS' face whitened. There was a huskiness in his voice when he spoke. "That means I'd better get out the old pick and shovel and prospector's pan, eh, Frank?"

"Lordy, no, Bob! We'll do some scatter drilling and—"

"Wait a minute, Frank. That cave-in drained me pretty low. Werner's been charging top prices, because his rig's the only one around that's not contracted for. Now he's doubling his prices. And it's generally known around that I've got a diamond drill on my place. No bank'll loan till they check up on that. And when they do, and find out about this lost—"

Williams nodded in full sympathy. "And if you fire Werner and shut down, you'll have to give the miners three-month's pay. That's the law. And the government will expropriate, sure as hell."

In the heavy silence that followed Toby asked a question; hesitating, feeling that it must sound childish to these men.

Williams spread his hands. "How far did it fault downward? That's hard to tell, Wayne. It's an old fault line, runs from twenty to forty feet."

Jennings cut in impatiently, ignoring the question and answer. "D'you know of anybody in the market, Frank?" There was a dull heaviness in his voice.

"That Latino outfit seems to have come to life, Bob. They were asking the other day about the old Baranda mine, near yours. Werner did a little drilling there and they came in with the owners to have the core samples checked. You might sound them out," Williams suggested. "But they're gypo, Bob. Foreign capital . . . small time European stuff."

"Beggars can't be choosers," Jennings commented. "Come on, Toby. You've learned a few things about mines you won't find in your yellow book."

Toby went to his hotel room early that night. He left Bob Jennings in a booth of the hotel bar, sipping cognac and talking with a hook-nosed Levantine who exuded the smell of garlic, and a feeling of snake-like craftiness. He was the Latino Mine Company representative.

Toby's room—high-ceilinged, almost bare of furniture—was stifling. The nearby mountain to the north of Guaymas stopped any air circulation from that direction and effectively backed up the light ocean breeze.

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Stripped of his pajama coat, he lay dripping under the oppressiveness of the mosquito net and listened to the squawking of automobile horns, the predominating night call of any Mexican city.

Toby had seen a rich mine at the top of its production become nothing more than a hole in the ground. But that vein was there some place. A channel of rich ore doesn't, by the very nature of its formation, end in nothing. It had shifted upward or downward. Williams had said downward. But Werner's drilling had proved that it hadn't slipped downward.

That pointed to multiple faulting, separate mass movements, closely joined, perhaps side movements. Or . . . The car horns had stopped now. Toby thought, drowsily, that the car drivers might have stopped to let the mountain pass them. Then he was flying his Norford down a dark mine tunnel. There was a light ahead of him that came and went. But it wasn't a beacon light. He knew that. It was too dim. It was a vein of pure gold. . . . He awakened suddenly and knew that there was someone in his room.

CHAPTER III

TORO, THE NIGHTMARE

HE LAY still and listened to guarded movements. There were two of them in the room. Perhaps more than two. Toby was unarmed.

A hand came into view, silhouetted against the square of window light. There was a knife in the hand. This, Toby understood, was to be a quiet murder. A quick downward stroke, a hand gripped over his mouth and nose until his body had stopped jerking.

A guarded beam of light flickered for an instant.

"*Aquí!* Search here!" came the Spanish, a soft whisper.

So it wasn't murder. That first thought was absurd. What could anybody gain by his death?

Toby's nerves were sensitive as tuned wires. Somehow they conveyed to him information that he couldn't get by sight or sound alone. There were two men in the room. The one with the knife was a small man. The height of the knife hand told him that. But how did he know that the other man was big, and clumsy?

"Silence, *toro grande! Caramba,* you would waken the dead with your awkwardness!"

Toby smiled grimly. Big bull. His senses hadn't lied to him. But why were they searching his room? Perhaps they had made a mistake in rooms. Certainly he had nothing worth stealing.

He started a slow inching of his body to the far side of the bed. It occurred to him once, as an amusing thought, that he should call out, offer to share equally with them anything of value they might find in his poor belongings.

But he knew well enough that the first word from him would mean cold steel sheathed in his body. The mosquito drape would give the others an advantage in case of struggle. Toby would be like a netted animal.

His guarded movements brought a thin squeak from the bed. It sounded loud in the room. An ominous silence followed. Toby lay on his back, eyes closed, feeling the presence of another person bending over him. He might be knifed now. Certainly if he made the tiniest movement he would get the sharp steel.

A faint glow of light filtered through closed eyelids. "*Dormido,*" the other said, finally satisfied. "Poncho, this

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sleeping gringo flyer is the big one. He would be the hard man for even you to handle."

"I would break his bones," came the hoarse whisper, "like dry mesquite. I would—"

"Silence!" the other hissed and moved away to resume searching.

Searching for what? He had thought they might be mistaken in the room they searched. The small man's recognition of him as the "gringo flyer" dispelled this thought.

He was on the very edge of the bed now, and was free of the mosquito net. He lowered one foot inch by inch and felt the cold smoothness of the concrete floor. He should be able to see light from the hallway through the door transom. But evidently they had turned the hall lights off before entering his room.

He was confident, however, that he could locate the door and get it open without much fumbling. He certainly had no intention of fighting it out with these two men in the room, knowing that at least one of them was armed. Then, as his other foot reached the floor, the bed skidded from his leaning weight.

There was no advantage now in silence. Toby let out a big war whoop and started sideways, crab-fashion, toward the door. He wasn't going to present the width of his unprotected back as a target for that knife.

It was well he didn't. The small man was after him with the speed and agility of a cat.

Toby had the door part open when the knife slashed across his arm. He whirled and grabbed the knife wrist with both hands, ignoring the other's clawing hand and kicking feet.

He heard the metallic clatter of the knife as it fell. Something struck him between the shoulder blades. It was more of a shove than a blow. It sent him staggering through the open door, out into the hallway. There were sounds out there of footsteps, blundering up the dark stairs.

It seemed as though there were at least a half-dozen people milling around out there, all of them shouting for the lights to be turned on.

In that confusion it was senseless trying to get his hands on the small man again. He might grab anyone. But there could be nobody behind him except the big man.

Toby whirled about, grimly intent on getting at least one scalp.

HIS hand struck a groping arm. He swung a knotted fist and heard a satisfying grunt of pain. He went in, left-jabbing to get the big man located. He swung again. This time there was a sharp, animal-like yelp of pain. He had caught him a hard one in the short ribs.

The man backed up under the brutal pounding. Toby felt a mighty arm crook about his neck. But his right was still free to work. He brought it around in a short, deadly rabbit-punch. The arm went slack. The man fell backward, head striking the half-opened bedroom door. Then lights blazed in the hallway.

"*Señor*, are you injured?"

Toby blinked, half-blinded by the sudden light. It was the little *mestizo* travel agent. Bob Jennings came loping down the hall, clad as Toby was, in pajama pants only. "What the hell goes on, Toby?"

Toby glanced toward his own doorway. He wanted to laugh, seeing the huge, swart man who sat there on the floor, rubbing his head, a comical look of amazement on his stupid face.

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"So you'd break me up like dry mesquite wood, hombre?" Then he glanced down to see rubies falling from the tips of his right fingers.

Esteban examined his knife wound, making tongue sounds of disapproval. The blood flowed in a tiny stream down his forearm, spreading across the back of his hand, dribbling from the finger tips.

"It is but a shallow flesh wound, fortunately, Señor Wayne," Esteban reassured him.

Suddenly, as the big Indian started talking, Esteban whirled to face him: *"Valgame Dios!"* he shrilled, "that we should have such things to happen! Keep still, I tell you!"

It seemed to Toby that there was more than anger in the abuse. It was something nearer fright.

"But Señor Esteban, you—"

"Silence, fool! Your master will explain this to you. Such things—"

"Why not let him talk, Esteban?" Toby drawled.

But the Indian's face had settled into a stupid, sullen mask. "I was drunk, *señor,*" he explained in a thick voice. "I thought to get more money for the mescal."

"Let's get a bandage on that arm, Toby," Jennings urged.

Two khaki-clad policemen came from the background and dragged the Indian to his feet.

"Wait a minute, Bob. There's a knife in there some place that I want to have a look at."

One of the policemen heard him and came back. "There was a knife, *señor?*"

"I didn't get this scratch from a cactus thorn," Toby growled.

Esteban had found the knife. He extended it toward Toby, gripping the handle.

"Caramba!" the policeman snarled. "Do you think the Guaymas police are *rurales*. You fool, you have ruined the fingerprints!"

Toby looked the *mestizo* over coolly. "Esteban," he drawled, "I'm wondering why you are the only civilian with all his clothes on?"

Esteban could explain that; of a certainty. He had been playing monte with his office assistant. And, later, the office assistant, under Esteban's threatening stare, swore by all the saints that it was the truth.

It was gray daylight before they got this all straightened out—*not* to Toby's satisfaction.

CHAPTER IV

MAROON THE MINER

THEY returned to the mine late that morning. Bob Jennings visited the bank and had another talk with the Latino Mining Company. On the trip back he sat stiffly erect in his seat, grimly, furiously silent.

But talk was unnecessary. Toby knew, as well as though Jennings had told him, that the bank had refused a loan, that the greasy, hook-nosed man and his friends had beaten Jennings' price down to beggar level and that there must have been a quarrel over this.

But this silence had a deeper significance than Toby understood.

Roberta was waiting for them at the mesa field when they landed. Her father left the plane, passing her without a word, without even a nod of recognition.

Roberta threw herself from her horse, running toward the plane. Toby met her at the door. "Bobby, what's the matter with you! You look as though you'd seen a ghost."

She clung to him with frantic arms.

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"My father, Toby! He has that black mood for killing. Toby, you must do something!"

"Bobby, quiet down and talk sense. I don't understand."

"It was this way when the bandits raided us when I was a child. They burned the mine residence; they killed our *mozos*. My father would talk to no one then."

She touched her breast. "Everything he kept here. For two weeks he said not a word, while they hunted the mountain trails until he found those men and killed their leader. I told you about it in the note."

"What note?" Toby asked.

"In the book that he brought you from me. I wrote it on the front, blank page of the book."

Toby sat down abruptly on the door-sill of the ship's cabin. "The mining book," he nodded. "Bobby, you quiet down. Let's get this straight."

"But Toby, there is no time! When Werner goes to—"

"Well, there's time enough to explain things so I won't be running around in circles. I don't blame your dad for wanting to kill someone, Bobby. There's a nigger in the woodpile some place. But he doesn't know where any more than I do. Why didn't you come with us yesterday, if you thought he'd go off the deep end?"

"I thought . . . Señor Werner had always been so polite to me; so nice, and—"

Toby smiled grimly. "I see. You thought the woman's touch would keep Werner busy with his drill."

"The pig! He has felt my quirt across his face."

"That's helps a lot," Toby observed dryly.

"Toby, you must do something! He has the drill taken apart and loaded on his pack mules. He will go down and talk big to my father. And in this mood my father will not talk. He will act."

Toby nodded. "Now we're getting a little sense." He stood up, flexing his right arm, stiff from the knife wound. "I feel like doing a little acting myself." He strode off toward the shaft buildings, leaving Roberta to stare after him like a frightened child.

Toby intercepted Frederick Werner on the tailings dump. "Just a minute, Werner."

The other looked him over with contempt in his pale eyes. "I have no business with you," he stated.

"You'd be surprised," the American told him, gently.

"I'll not fist-fight with you," the Prussian said. "In my country—"

"Nuts. You better forget the comic-opera stuff; you've got something to worry about now. If you go down to the mine residence Bob Jennings'll shoot you, understand?"

The effect of these words was astonishing. Werner's face went deadly white, so that the quirt welt on his cheek stood out in angry color. "He—he found out?"

Toby's eyes narrowed. He caught at the question, turning it over swiftly in his mind. He was on the edge of solving this problem. "Yes," he said slowly, "he found out. So you're through, Werner. You might as well confess that—"

"So he found out the vein was completely lost, eh?" Werner was his cool self again.

Toby understood that he had muddled things. He had been too eager to get an admission from the other man. There was nothing to be gained, now that Werner had recovered from that first momentary confusion.

"You can do as you like, Werner," Toby said. "But I advise you to clear

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out of here. Right now. Collect your pay at Guaymas."

The other stood uncertainly, trying to read Toby's face. "That is a long trip," he said.

"You'll take a longer journey, if you try talking to Jennings. And you won't be coming back," Toby added.

Werner came to a decision. "Jennings should understand," he said, "that if my pay isn't waiting for me there at Guaymas—"

"You should understand," Toby cut in roughly, "that I'm not wasting any more time on you. Clear out!"

Werner managed a dignified retreat. Toby started for the mine residence, moving slowly, thoughtfully. He was as sure, as sure as a man could be sure of anything, that Frederick Werner knew what had happened to the lost vein. But the facts didn't fit in with this conjecture.

WERNER could not profit by his knowledge without capital. Bob Jennings had said nobody would trust the man without visual proof to back his statements. That, of course, would be in the form of core samples. But there was only one practical way to get such drill samples to the outside. That was by plane.

Alone, and with Jennings, Toby had made a number of trips into Guaymas, carrying these samples but in no case had they allowed them out of sight until they were placed in the keeping of Frank Williams. He would swear to Williams' honesty.

Toby dismissed the possibility of anything being left in or about his airplane, to be picked up by confederates at Guaymas. The plane cabin was kept locked and it was under guard, both at the mine and at the Guaymas field. Moreover, it would be practically impossible for a layman to conceal anything in a modern, streamlined airplane.

There was no sense in the thing any way he looked at it. If Werner couldn't get money without showing proof and if he hadn't been able to send the latter out by plane, his natural move would be to leave as soon as he could, to carry that proof himself.

But he had shown no desire to leave the mine. He had, indirectly, brought pressure on Jennings to sell, by insisting on immediate payment for services, and by doubling his charges. But that was the only suspicious thing he had done. That and the confusion he had shown just a few minutes before.

Toby moved his shoulders impatiently. Perhaps he imagined that confusion. Perhaps the vein *was* hopelessly lost and they were just imagining this plot to get Jennings' mine.

But still, there was that unexplained attack on himself the previous night. Those two men had been searching for something. They hadn't found whatever it was they searched for, or they would have left, without disturbing him. Yet this morning he had found nothing in his belongings or about the room that could possibly interest anyone.

A voice broke into Toby's thoughts: *"Buenos dias, señor."* It was Carlos Huerto, Jennings' Mexican mine superintendent.

"Hello, Carlos," Toby responded. "How're things underground?"

The *jefe* shrugged, his mouth losing its smile. "Very badly, señor. That ore at the lower level, she is not so good."

Toby nodded. "Just how much pay metal would there be, Carlos, with a plate cleanup?"

The Mexican's good-looking face tightened. "That, Señor Wayne," he said gently, "is the business of Don Jennings."

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The Mexican's reply brought anger. But Toby knew he had no right to be angry with Huerto. "Okay," he said stiffly. "I'm just the hired hand around here. One of these freak airplane pilots."

He turned away, walking the short distance to the house. Huerto was right, of course. He didn't know anything about mining, didn't have any right intruding into Jennings' business. But somebody had better be doing something immediately—something based on an intelligent plan.

BOB JENNINGS must have seen his approach. He came out of the house to meet him. Roberta followed at a little distance, but said nothing.

"Get the plane out and ready to fly," Jennings ordered.

That was all. There was no room in his manner or voice for questioning. He was telling a paid employee to do something and he expected obedience. He had a right to expect it. Toby nodded and started for the airfield.

He and Juan, one of the Mexican watchmen, dollied his big Norford out of the corrugated iron hangar and he started the engine.

Toby sat in the control cab, wondering what Jennings intended to do in Guaymas. It seemed to him the problem was right here at the mine. Unless Jennings had run across some evidence or information here, to work on.

Toby's eyes came to rest on the yellow book. He took it out of the chart rack. The pages fell open at a book mark:

"Love is not a thing to be caged," she murmured, tenderly, her lips burning into his. "Love is a crimson torrent, a . . ."

"Nuts!" Toby muttered, and turned to read the title: *Crimson Passion.* This was Werner's book—

Juan was signaling him, pointing. Toby eased back on the throttle, turning to see Jennings enter the cabin. Jennings took a seat in the small passenger compartment, motioning for him to take off.

Toby checked the windsock and taxied reluctantly to the lee side of the mesa field, his mind busy with conflicting thoughts.

For one thing, he was worried about Jennings. The miner was carrying a gun; his old long-barreled Colt revolver; belted under his coat. Under the circumstances, and in his present mood, almost anything might happen. It would be fine if Jennings could be put on a desert island for a few days, to cool off.

Toby turned into the wind, checking his switches, automatically catching the tack reading, the oil pressure. He advanced the throttle, releasing the brakes and getting the tail up for takeoff. Then he was fighting the turbulent lower air.

When finally he had the plane on course toward Guaymas, he glanced back into the passenger compartment. Jennings sat in one of the four seats the compartment provided, staring grimly and with unseeing eyes out of the side window.

There was trouble, if Toby had ever seen trouble. It was worse than flying a load of nitro. And the mixup in the two books promised to complicate this. By mistake he had given Esteban the book on ore mining and Roberta had written a note on the flyleaf—a warning against her father's temper. Now if her father did get into a fight of some kind in Guaymas, that note certainly wouldn't be of any help to him.

But he couldn't reason with Jennings. He couldn't turn and fly him back to

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the mine. And he certainly didn't want to take him on into Guaymas. A well isolated desert island would be the ideal solution. And at that moment Toby glanced forward and saw the desert island.

THE hacienda of Don Morrico Andiés de Vitorio was, for all practical purposes, a desert island. Even better. Jennings would be welcomed as an old, well loved friend.

Seeing the green patch of Don Andiés' hacienda, far ahead, surrounded on all sides by the dreary barrenness of mesquite and cactus, Toby could picture the old Spaniard's delight at this welcomed visitation. They would barbecue a prime steer. Of a certainty! Better still, a half-dozen prime steers . . . they would have a fiesta . . .

Chuckling to himself, Toby's gloved left hand moved from the throttle to the altitude adjustment. He was going to have engine trouble. Yes, indeed. Very bad engine trouble. They would be fortunate that the engine continued turning over long enough for them to reach the haven of Don Andiés ranch.

It worked out as Toby had planned, but with such ease, such complete lack of suspicion on Jennings' part, that Toby felt a twinge of guilt. He decided that it would be better all around if he didn't stay with Jennings at the desert ranch. He fussed about the engine, noting with pleasure Jennings' gradual change of voice and manner, under the warmth of Don Andiés' welcome.

A half hour later he told them the engine was in good enough condition for him to fly it back for a more thorough repair job. The mine owner gave him a note to his mine superintendent and sent him off with strict orders to return the following morning, if it were humanly possible.

CHAPTER V

FLYER LEAVES THE SKY

IT IS uncertain just when the madness overtook the big flyer. Toby himself couldn't have said just when it happened, nor exactly what caused it.

Perhaps it was the note that Jennings sent to Carlos Huerto, directing the superintendent to give Toby all assistance possible in his work. That work, of course, was repairing the airplane engine. But the note said merely:

Put yourself and men at Wayne's disposal. Rush the work.

R. Jennings.

Or perhaps it was the book, called *Crimson Passion*. Toby wasn't much interested in lurid love but the statement that "love was a crimson torrent" had caught his eye. Anyway, Bobicito had suggested he read up on the matter.

At any rate, after the flyer had landed on the mesa field, he made a careful search of the plane, going to the length of removing a floor board in the forward end. Under this he found a number of small pebbles, the stub of a pencil, a quantity of fine sand, a small piece of rock and other articles, none of them of any apparent value.

But the flat piece of rock had on it the number *953* and Toby seemed to consider it of such great value that he wrapped it tenderly in his pocket handkerchief before starting down toward the mine assay building. He was looking for Carlos Huerto.

The superintendent wasn't in the small building, but Toby found him in the mill, bending studiously over an amalgam plate, holding a small piece of sodium cyanide in tongs.

Toby watched him touching up tarnished spots on the mercury-coated

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copper plate. He knew that the success of the plan he had in mind depended to a large extent on his handling of the Mexican. That and the fact that away from routine mine procedure Huerto was not very shrewd.

"Huerto," Toby shouted, to be heard above the rumble of mill machinery. "Come here!"

The Mexican straightened. When he saw who it was, a frown came to his face. Next to Jennings he was the big *jefe* here. He wasn't accustomed to taking orders from anyone but the mine owner. He walked over slowly, questioning Toby with his eyes.

"Put that cyanide down and come with me," the other commanded.

"What?"

"Hurry up. I'll explain outside, where we can hear each other."

Outside, Toby dropped his bombshell. "Mr. Jennings is going to be busy in Guaymas for a week or so. He's put me in charge here."

The Mexican looked at him. "In charge of the mine?" he repeated incredulously. "In charge of the whole mine!"

"Here." He gave Huerto the note from Jennings. He did it in a casual, off-hand manner, as though there was nothing unusual about the whole thing.

Huerto took a long time reading the brief note. When he at length spoke there was a sulky tone in his voice. It was evident he didn't like the situation, but was too smart to jeopardize a good job by showing opposition to this new boss. "What are your orders, *señor?*" he inquired.

"Come along," Toby ordered, starting for the assay office.

Inside the office he asked for an ore sample of the lost vein. He faced this up and then, under a strong light, compared it with the flat rock he had found under the floorboard. He nodded wisely as he focused the glass on first one stone and then the other. He was going to have a lot of bluffing to do before this job was finished.

"Have a look at those two samples," he directed.

Huerto spoke, after a careful study of the two flat surfaces. "They are of the same vein, I think," he stated. "Is that what you mean?"

Toby kept the triumph he felt from showing in his face. So far his theory was hitting on all cylinders. There was only one way in which that fragmentary section of drill core could have found its way into his plane. It was very thin. The rest of it must have been crumbled to bits under his feet.

"I want you to be damned sure they're the same, Carlos."

The Mexican shrugged. "With such a small sample that would be impossible, *señor*. But the rusty gold—that is from iron oxide; she is the very devil on the amalgam plates, señor. Our mill is the only one in this section to have such trouble."

"Good! Now listen closely, Huerto. Your job may depend on the way you handle yourself during the next few days. There's going to be a big change around here, understand?"

"Si, señor. Si, si!" A sudden fright replaced the sullenness in Huerto's face.

"Okay. Now you collect a crew of fresh men. As many as can work in the eight-hundred-foot tunnel."

"The old tunnel, *señor?* The one of the lost vein?"

"That's right. I want as many as can work without getting into each other's way. Divide the other men into two other shifts, for twenty-four hour work. And I want plenty of dynamite, plenty of tools, plenty of sharp drill steel. Is

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that clear? Send the crew and the other stuff down as fast as you can. I'll meet you on 800."

Toby knew that his biggest task in deception was still ahead. He might confuse the superintendent with peremptory orders, but it would take more than that to convince Roberta Jennings.

BUT she was absent from the house. He ordered a double lunch put up and the house boy found a pair of Jennings' mine boots that fitted him. For the rest, Toby stripped down to light underwear and put on mechanic's coveralls. It would be hard to find anything less suited to mine work, but it was the best he had. Jennings' clothes would be much too small.

Coming from his room he heard Roberta Jennings whistling a tricky little Mexican tune, adding a gay flourish here and there of her own devising. Toby thought it was a fine way for Jennings' daughter to be acting at a time like this.

"Where's Dad?" she greeted him, in the living room. "I rode up to meet the plane, but you weren't there."

Toby had prepared himself for this. "We—that is, he—stopped off at Don Morrico's for a few days."

"Don Morrico's? But why?" Then the smile returned to her lips. "That's grand. Everything's grand, Toby!"

"I'm glad you think so," he returned stiffly. He had been afraid she would worry. A few minutes before he would have given a lot to have her in this gay mood. Now he heartily disapproved.

She executed a few neat steps of the *jarabe,* the Mexican sombrero dance, imaginary castanets held in the graceful movements of her hands. "Everything is most lovely," she sang.

Her mood changed. She moved close to him, her body warm against his, her eyes and lips teasing him with a promise. "I am beautiful, am I not? You do love me, don't you, Toby?"

His arms hung stiffly at his sides. This alluring, mocking person was not the gallant little Bobby Jennings that he thought he knew. He bent and felt her warm, seeking lips. "I love you or hate you," he said coldly. "I don't know which it is."

She sprang back from him, eyes wide and dark with anger. "What a hateful thing to do; to say! You are angry because I have saved the mine. Because Don Werner—"

"Saved the mine!" Toby exclaimed.

"Certainly. Don Frederick is getting his drill together again. He is sure where he will find the vein. It was the geologist, Frank Williams, who misdirected him."

"So it's Don Frederick now," Toby said. "This morning you had another name for him."

"But I was mistaken. I was foolish. He has explained all that."

"Maybe you'll explain how he knows where to look for that vein," Toby suggested.

She gestured impatiently. "It is those faultings. But you wouldn't understand."

"No," Toby admitted heavily, "I suppose I wouldn't. You might just try, though, to get it into my dumb head."

"It is—it is," she paused, groping for the word. "It is lateral faulting. That is what it is. But you wouldn't—"

"You mean side movement?" Toby cut in.

"Yes. Yes. You *do* understand. A little. Don't you?"

"A little bit," Toby admitted.

"Such funny clothes!" Roberta said, noticing for the first time his attire.

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"Oh, it's just—that is, your dad wanted Huerto to—well, I just thought I'd go down and watch them. Nothing to do around here."

"No," she admitted coldly. "There are the horses to ride, of course. But you are afraid to ride. And I'll be very busy—talking to Don Frederick."

"Better have your riding quirt handy," Toby advised her and swung off angrily to get his lunch from the cook shack.

SO WERNER had changed his mind about going to Guaymas. He was afraid if he pushed things too hard Bob Jennings, in desperation, might disregard the drilling evidence and start poking around underground.

Toby found a miner's steel hat and a lamp in the shaft house. Huerto and his crew and material had already gone below. He stepped onto the muddy floor planks of the cage and signaled. The hoist man grinned down at him and moved his hand to a lever. Toby's feet left the planking and for minutes he seemed to hang in mid-air as the cage dropped free into dripping blackness.

Toby found the crew waiting for him back in the drift. It was warm down here. Most of the peons wore nothing but breechcloths, leather *guaraches* on their feet and steel hats. Their bodies seemed such frail things to be presented thus naked to the danger of falling rocks. But clothing would be little or no protection.

They watched his approach with stolid faces. Some of them were crouched around a deck of greasy cards.

Toby stood for a few minutes, looking things over, knowing that Carlos Huerto was watching him.

"All right," Toby ordered. "Get busy on that facing. We'll push in another fifteen feet; same curvature."

Huerto was smiling furtively. "But if we do, *señor,* we must have timber, for the walls, for capping."

Toby hadn't thought about that. He knew how to move rock above ground. He'd moved plenty of it. But underground. . .

"Of course we need timber, you fool. Didn't you bring any?"

Huerto jumped under the lashing voice. "I am sorry. I—"

"That doesn't timber a mine. Now look alive! Get on the job or there'll be another man drawing your *jefe's* pay."

Hardrock men are hardrock men, wherever you find them. Toby knew their language. He saw the giant Yaqui, Perico, the mine's best powder monkey, exchange glances with the others. From that moment he knew who to talk to when he wanted to address the crew.

"All right, Perico," he commanded. "Let's see some rock fly."

Toby kept as much in the background as he could until the holes were sunk. It takes skill to place them, to shoot your material out where you want it. Toby could do it above ground, but down here he wasn't sure of himself. Not at all.

Perico's assistant brought dynamite to him, tamping rods, detonating caps, sifted dirt. Toby checked them over with his eyes, on familar ground, now. He watched the big man measure his fuse and cut it; watched him carefully remove a detonator cap from its box—a slender copper tube, half-filled with fulminate of mercury.

Even the most hardened powder monkey has respect for that sensitive, terrible explosive. Perico slipped fuse in cap and looked about for the crimping tool. But where was that thrice-cursed thing?

"Here!" Toby stepped forward, took the cap and fuse, shoved it into his

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mouth, clear back to the molars, and clamped down.

It took nice judgment of distance. A fraction of an inch too near the closed end and his brains would be splattered on the damp tunnel walls. He handed the capped fuse back to Perico and saw a wide grin of appreciation on the swarthy face. The Yaqui could understand things like that.

They worked for him now. When he watched them they knew that he appreciated what they were doing. That made a world of difference.

He took a muck stick from one of them and shoveled with the others while the man went to bring an *olla* of clean drinking water. He thrust his heavy shoulder against a filled ore car, helped them to get it moving.

They worked for him. But the progress was maddeningly slow. He stayed below to get the swing shift started and then went up to grass-level, alone in the cage. He took a hot shower in the change room and a long cold shower and dog-trotted to the mine residence, frigid night air biting through his sweat-soaked clothing.

CHAPTER VI

HE SPEAKS ACID

HE WAS up in time for lunch, stiff and a little groggy. A warm shower fixed that. In front of the mirror he swabbed iodine on the knife wound he had received in Guaymas. It was already healing. Cuts always healed fast for him.

"Dumb, but healthy," he muttered.

He flexed his arms before the mirror, taking a boyish pleasure in their quick, hard bunching. "Another day," he told himself, "an' I'll be able to do a shift with any of 'em. Any one of 'em."

Quite pleased with himself, he went out to the dining room. He stopped suddenly, at the arched door. Frederick Werner was seated at the table, apparently feeling quite at home. It seemed to Toby that at that instant Roberta Jennings moved a little nearer to the drill man. At least, in some feminine manner, she managed to convey an intimacy there that excluded him.

"Good morning," she greeted him. "Did you have enjoyment watching the miners?"

"Yeah," Toby carelessly responded. "Lotsa fun. Think I'll go down again."

"You were working in the mine?" Werner inquired.

"Just watchin' 'em," Toby answered, spreading his napkin. "Say, I'm not butting in—I mean, intruding here, am I?"

"Oh, not at all, not at all," Werner graciously assured him. "Miss Jennings merely—"

"It's a barbarity," the girl said, "for such a nice man to eat with the *peones*. Mr. Werner knows so many interesting things."

"Uh-huh," Toby allowed. "I expect he does."

There was an intentness in Werner's pale eyes. "They are doing much work in the mine?" he inquired.

"Yeah. Digging rock," Toby answered, making a flank attack on his papaya.

"That would be on the eleven hundred foot level?"

Toby kept his face blank. "Search me. You just get on that elevator thing and—*bowie*—you're down in the dark, to the bottom of everything. They're diggin' for gold," he wisely added. "Not getting much."

Werner sat back in his chair, faintly smiling.

"Toby doesn't understand," Roberta

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explained. "But that must be the eleven hundred—it's the bottom level."

Toby scooped four eggs on his plate and went at them with enjoyment. When Roberta and Werner excused themselves he was still eating. He immediately ordered another half-dozen fried eggs, more ham and hotcakes and *frijoles frito,* and another big lunch to take out. What he was going to do would require bodily fuel and lots of it.

Once more in the mine he found, as he had expected, that the swing and day shift had accomplished, between them, little more than his night shift alone. The peons would, of course, take every possible advantage of the new management.

Toby watched the *jefecito* in charge loitering about without interest in the work, stopping the others in their labor to joke with them.

One man worked apart from the rest, with a fury of effort that was astonishing. He was an old man and, from the set of his lips, entirely without teeth.

TOBY moved over, put his hand on the bare, skinny shoulder. He felt the man quiver under his touch. The shovel dropped, the old man straightened from his work, a hopeless, frightened expression on his ugly face.

"Señor?" he quavered.

"You are an old one, hombre."

"Compasión, señor. I have the large family to support. I work very hard, *señor,* and I am not so old as you think." He touched the pursed lips. "I have not lost these from old age, *señor.* I have work in the mercury mines, *señor.* Before that I am a *jefecito,* a trusted man."

"Your name?"

"Jesus Heraclio. I beg you, *señor. . . !"*

Toby scowled him to silence, stooping for the fallen shovel. "Come, old one," he commanded.

Standing beside the mine boss, his hand on the old man's shoulder, he raised his voice. *"Atención!"* he shouted to the others. "Know that this one is your new *jefecito.* Know that you obey him as you would me. He speaks with my voice."

Toby thrust the shovel into the hands of the former boss. "Take this," he snarled. "Use it with energy, for I shall be watching you. Learn from a creaking, weary back that a *jefecito* must be one worthy of trust."

The look that the other gave him reminded Toby to bring his gun on the next trip down. There is a tacit agreement among peon miners that authority shall be unquestioned, unmolested underground. But Toby knew that this rule had its limits and that he had done a serious thing in putting this strange one in charge of the gang.

Jesus Heraclio was a very fiend for making them work; for spotting the loafers. Should a man pretend to work, lean against an ore car without effort to push it, his rusty voice lashed out with a torrent of idiomatic sarcasm.

Did the man's *esposa* put air in his *tortillas* that he was too faint for honest labor? Was he the man of legend who hunted with a bed strapped to his back? If so, he should recall what had happened to that man when the *leónes* bared their fangs.

This sarcasm had its effect. The men worked, fearing to be the next victim of ridicule. They laughed at the volleyed sarcasm, as primitive people will always laugh at another's discomfort. But withal there was a sullen tenseness about them.

Toby worked as a member of the gang. Thus he gained their respect for

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his undoubted superiority of muscle and at the same time lost face because he had put himself on their level. As long as he showed this untiring physical superiority, all was well. Let him slack up for but a moment and they would all have the right to loaf. Toby knew.

Working with the powder man, Toby ostentatiously capped three two-inch fuses and secured them in half-sticks of dynamite. These he thrust into his breast pocket. The action was duly noted and there was an exchange of short, chirping whistles.

It was the ancient language of the Indian miner. Centuries before this the Spanish *conquistadores,* lashing peon slaves in their greed for wealth, had heard those strange whistling notes underground and had been trapped by cave-ins, crushed under falling rocks.

The night shift, or what Toby thought of as the night shift, came on. The tunnel was now extended the required footage, or at least, the distance that Toby hoped would put them into unfaulted rock.

The material they had passed through had required a tremendous amount of timbering and lagging to hold walls and ceiling. Now it was firm, virgin rock. Toby was working more from instinct than any knowledge he had gained from Williams' explanations. Normal and reverse faults, the "hade", "throw", "heave", "displacement"—those mining terms were a meaningless confusion in his mind.

HE DIRECTED Carlos Huerto to widen the drift tunnel for an oblong-shaped "winze", shaft, the greatest dimension to be at right angles to the drift. They had followed the former curvature of the vein. He hoped the widened shaft would allow for lateral displacement.

It was all based on hope and, Toby realized, wishful thinking. That and a thin core section—mysteriously present under the floorboard of his airplane—that carried the numerals, 953.

There was where he would find the lost vein. Toby was gambling everything he had on that theory, or guess. The vein was nine hundred and fifty-three feet below the elevation of Werner's drill when he took the sample. But, not knowing how many feet Werner's drill had been above the upper shaft level, Toby had no way of telling how deep he would have to sink the winze. The drift levels, of course, indicated depth below the shaft top level.

Frank Williams had told him the old fault drop averaged between twenty and forty feet. It was slim evidence for a man to gamble on—on which to stake everything he had. Everything, including the love of Roberta Jennings. But perhaps he had already lost that.

Hiding his weariness, Toby drove himself to the work, setting an example for all of them.

Every muscle of his body ached that following morning when he climbed doggedly from bed and, only half awake, stood under the near-to-scalding water of the shower bath. But there was a difference this morning. He had always kept himself in condition. Now he was sweated and pounded down to fighting trim.

Again Werner was at lunch with Roberta. After a brief word of greeting Toby ate in silence. The girl was flirting openly with Werner. It was disgusting, Toby thought. He was seeing Roberta Jennings as she really was. She had no resemblance to the ideal he had shaped in his mind. But despite these thoughts, a slow anger grew in him.

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It was well that the conversation changed to another tack.

"I have been speaking with Carlos Huerto," Werner said, in a pause of their conversation.

Toby caught a hidden note in the careless observation. "Is that right?" he asked, matching the other in casualness.

"He tells me they are working the eight hundred level."

Toby shrugged, pretending to be engrossed with food. "Maybe so," he allowed. "Me, I get lost soon's that elevator starts down."

Werner's smile was thin. "Strange," he observed. "Huerto tells me that practically all the mine force has been shifted to that level—by your orders."

Toby caught the startled expression on Roberta's face. He continued stolidly eating. "Funny," he observed, between mouthfuls, "how a story like that could get started."

"Yes, isn't it?" Werner answered, in a thin voice, dropping his pretense. "He tells me that you have demoted men, appointing new bosses. That you have been selecting certain men for the night shift; disrupting the whole organization. That, in a word, you have actually taken charge of the whole mine."

"Can it be true!" Toby exclaimed.

Roberta cut in angrily. "Are you doing these things, Toby?"

Toby nodded toward Werner. "He says I am."

"Why didn't you tell me, Frederick?"

"When I tell things," Werner said virtuously, "I tell them to the guilty one's face."

"You wouldn't want to come outside and tell me those things now would you, Mr. Werner?" Toby drawled, hopefully.

"No," the girl commanded. "There shall be no fighting! Don't you know anything but brute force? By what authority do you do those things?"

"By authority of a forged note," Werner sneered.

Toby got abruptly to his feet.

"Please! Sit down, please. I tell you there shall be no fighting. Where is that note? I will know instantly if it is forged."

Toby handed her the folded note.

"This is not forged," Roberta said, after a puzzled scrutiny. "But why should my father do this? You do not understand mining."

"Let me see that note," Werner demanded, forgetting himself.

She turned, eyebrows arched. "And why should you see it?" she coolly asked. She handed it back to Toby and excused herself. After a threatening stare Werner also left the room.

CHAPTER VII

THREE CHOSE MISERY

TOBY, on his way to the shaft house, was stopped by Juan, one of the watchmen on his plane. He was a young Mexican and a gay, friendly fellow. But there was no smile now to show the perfect whiteness of his teeth.

"*Buenos días, señor,*" he said.

Toby was stopped by his troubled manner. "Anything wrong with the airplane, Juan?"

"No, no, *señor.*" The smile came briefly. "I clean that damn' airplane so much she hurt your eyes for look at it."

"That's good, Juan." He waited, knowing there was more to come.

"Milk-eyes, *señor,*" Juan warned in a low voice, "that one does not like you. He talks much with the *peones.*"

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"Werner? Don't worry about him and me, Juan. And Huerto'll take care of the peons."

"But, *señor,* Carlos and Señor Werner, they are so very good friends now, I theenk. And the *peones* growl among themselves and have anger for Jesus Heraclio. That old house cat has the heart of a *león, señor.*"

Toby nodded. "I shall warn that one to tread lightly, Juan. Is there more?"

"When there ees, *señor,* I will tell you. I am good friend for you, *señor.*"

"I know it, Juan. And I thank you."

"Another theeng, *señor,* Perico—you know that great Yaqui bull? He ees drunk this morning. He ees use the machete for cut off one *peone's* ear. He say he ees your friend, maybe. Until he finds that out for sure, each word against you will be an ear cut off. But if he finds for true you are *compadres,* then one word against you will be a head cut off." Juan chuckled with enjoyment. "That ees funny, no?"

"Very funny," Toby agreed, trying to understand what it was about mayhem that so amused these people.

"And I suppose," he muttered, continuing toward the mine, "that if we are not *compadres* the damn' fool'll be trying his machete out on my ears or head." He was very glad now of the heavy automatic belted to his hip.

The winze was deep enough now that they had to use buckets and ropes. It should have been down further, but the swing shift had accomplished little.

Jesus Heraclio, very much on the job, had completed the base structure for a hand-operated windlass.

"I have ordered the drum and crank, *señor,*" he explained, "but those shop *peones* laugh at me. The shop foreman say that I speak with your voice, *si,* and that it is the voice of a jackass."

"The nightingale," Toby observed, giving the long-eared pack animal his Mexican title of affection, "is one who kicks very hard, Jesus."

A wide, toothless smile from the old man. "It is God's truth, *senor.* I will give you the measurements for that drum."

A short time later the big American was illustrating his point on the body of the shop foreman. The shop crew doubled up with delighted laughter, seeing their *jefe* soused headfirst into the charcoal-blackened water of an annealing tank.

Toby set the sputtering foreman on his feet. "You will now," he directed, "bray like a jackass."

Two more sousings in grimy water and the foreman put all his heart and energy into a credible imitation of a donkey. The crew shouted with laughter, beating each other's backs in their enjoyment.

"Excellent," Toby applauded the foreman's efforts. "Who shall doubt now that you are the brother to a donkey? Let that windlass drum be delivered in two hours or I will be back to show how we build a fire under the belly of a balky jackass."

The windlass was completed and ready for operation before the night shift came on.

TOBY'S worry now was in having too many men. There was only room in the shaft for three muckers. When they cleaned up, there was space only for two single-jack men or one double-jack setup.

Heraclio solved this problem, dividing his men in three groups, working them at top speed, relieving them often by those who had been allowed to rest.

By experimenting Toby found the double-jack setup best. Instead of two

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men pecking away at individual drills it was better to have a single drill with a man to hold and turn and two men striking with the heavier, double-jack hammers.

This was the way they were working when Carlos Huerto came on with his night shift. And with the night shift came trouble.

Huerto stopped Toby, out of earshot of the gang.

"Señor," he spoke in a polite, sober voice. "Don Werner tells me the note you have from Don Jennings is a falsity —it was not written by Don Jennings."

Toby glanced over toward the loitering crew. "Perico," he shouted, "you will get your men to work!" He lowered his voice. "What you say, Huerto," he told the *jefe,* "is a very serious thing."

He led Huerto down the tunnel to the opening of a short cross-drift. He dipped his head, so that the reflected beam from his miner's light struck directly into the other's face. He didn't like the thought of what he was about to do.

"I understand, *señor,"* Huerto acknowledged, "that it is, as you say, a serious thing. But if what Don Werner says is true, then it is more serious."

"Tell me, Huerto. Since Werner has not seen this message from Don Jennings, how does he know it to be false writing?"

"But Don Werner *has* seen the note!"

"If he says that, he lies."

There was a stubborn silence. Toby shrugged. He couldn't find it in his heart to blame Huerto. "It is that you would trust Werner above me?"

Huerto nodded, slowly.

With a small sigh of regret, Toby's right fist chopped upward. He caught the unconscious superintendent in gentle arms and carried him, like a sleeping boy, up the cross-shaft. He made him as comfortable as he could on a dry part of the tunnel floor and, returning shortly with a length of rope, bound him hand and foot, but not painfully. Later he was to regret this. It is impossible to be gentle and yet efficient in such matters.

Perico, the big Yaqui Indian, had said he would learn whether or not the American was his friend, his *compadre;* in effect, whether Toby was worthy to be the comrade of such a mighty man. The Yaquis are a proud race, chary of their friendship. Perico had been drunk at the time. But not too drunk, Toby knew, or he wouldn't yet be sober for work.

Wondering about this, Toby helped for a while, cleaning up from the day shift's blasting.

Returning from the water *olla,* Toby found Perico waiting for him, a peculiar smile on heavy lips. He lifted a double-jack hammer, holding it up by the very end of its handle, straight out from his body, the whole length horizontal. It was a feat that few men there could duplicate. Yet the Indian held it so with ease, speaking with elaborate carelessness.

"It is a nice little thing, eh, *señor?"*

Toby nodded, smiling. His light beam played on the twelve-pound mark stamped in the hammer head. The other workers had stopped to watch this. Seconds ticked by. Toby watched those great, corded muscles, watched the smile on Perico's face become set and staring with the effort.

He knew he could refuse this challenge and yet keep at least a semblance of authority over the gang. But if he accepted, and failed, he was finished here.

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Slowly, then, the hammer was lowered and as its head touched the rocks Perico exhaled a great, noisy gust from his barrel chest.

Toby extended his hand. He swung the hammer, straight out from his body, as the Indian had done. "As you say, Perico," he smiled, "it is a nice *little* thing."

FOR the first few seconds it did seem a little thing. He started counting, as he had counted while Perico strained. It seemed as if he could hold the hammer extended thus for a long time, much longer than the Yaqui had held it.

But the leverage of the extended twelve pounds asserted itself immediately. The effort became painful and this pain grew with astonishing speed. Perico's black eyes were studying him, judging his ability to withstand that pain.

Toby had done the trick many times in construction camps. This was the first time he had prolonged it, as a test of strength and nerve. His wrist and arm were afire now with pain that stabbed at the base of his neck. It was only by the greatest effort that he slowed his counting to the length of seconds. The tendency was to count as fast as possible, to get through with this torture.

Perico's eyes were on him with cruel intentness. He was still short of the other's count. He could never make it. He held his stomach muscles tight and did the old parade-ground trick of wriggling his toes. It is this trick that keeps a real soldier at stiff, inhuman attention for an hour, two hours, under blazing sun while recruits wilt from the strain.

Then, when his arm seemed burning with torture, a new strength came to him from some hidden source. More than strength, it was the nerve to make his muscles hold the weight.

As the seconds mounted he saw a smile grow on Perico's face.

He passed the other's mark, added five slow, agonizing seconds to the count. Then he swung the hammer in a slow arc and held it for another five seconds, extended sideways. He lowered it gently to the tunnel floor, struggling to control his breathing.

"And now that we have played," he said, "let us work."

"Let us work," Perico agreed in a loud voice. "Come, you staring fools! You have heard the orders of my *compadre*."

The absence of Carlos Huerto went unnoticed in the resulting excitement. Here was a thing to be talked about! Here was a gringo who carried authority in his arm as well as in that gun, and in the short-fused dynamite in his breast pocket.

During that first confusion Toby was able to slip away from their lights, into the cross-drift, and there he was sick. He washed his face in a pool of run-off water. There would be a great change in the peons' talk, he thought, with grim humor, if they had seen him a moment before.

He knew that his time was growing short. This might be his last shift. It might be that Roberta Jennings would wait for them at the shaft house and order them to stop work. Would the men obey her or would they obey him and go on with the work? It seemed reasonable that they would obey the owner's daughter.

Up to this time he had kept the mine superintendent ignorant of his plans. Perhaps if he talked with Huerto in a reasonable manner, he might get the other's support. He would tell him everything: about the drill-core

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sample, about the mysterious search of his room, about his suspicions of Werner and Esteban.

It all seemed to him so clearcut, so logical, that he would surely be able to convince Huerto. Yes, that was the thing to do. He should have done it in the first place.

With this resolution Toby walked the short distance to the cross-drift end.

Carlos Huerto had disappeared.

A tangle of new hemp rope was the only evidence that Huerto had ever been in the drift. By this time he would be out of the mine, seeking Werner's aid.

"That," Toby said aloud, "is what a man gets for being a soft-headed sap."

Toby walked back to the winze and called Perico aside.

"Perico," he said abruptly, "we're in for some trouble."

The Yaqui grinned, licking his heavy lips. "Me, I like some trouble, *compadre.*"

A pistol shot sounded from the main shaft end of the tunnel.

"All right, *compadre.* You're going to get it," Toby promised, heading toward the sound.

JESUS HERACLIO stumbled into the radius of his light. "They come, *señor!*" he panted. "I get myself down with them. I run to warn you. They shoot."

"Perico," Toby commanded. "Ahead of me! Quickly, twenty . . . thirty paces! Flatten against the wall; hold your lamp out to cover those who come. So!"

Toby balanced his own lamp on a rock ledge, to shine down the tunnel. He stepped to the other side of the tunnel, saw a group approaching.

"Stop there!" he commanded them.

"The jig's up, Wayne." It was Werner's voice.

"If you think so," the American said coldly, "just step forward another foot, and get a forty-five slug in you."

There was silence, and then the voice of Roberta Jennings, pleading with him. "Toby, have you gone crazy!"

"You keep out of this, Roberta."

"But, Toby, you don't understand what you are doing!"

"I understand what I am *trying* to do," Toby returned.

There was the sound of men behind him. One of the miners spoke: "But *we* do not understand, *señor.* This is not our business. If the *señorita* says —"

"Heraclio, come take this lamp!"

It was the Yaqui who spoke. The old man scuttled forward in obedience to that savage growl.

The huge Yaqui crouched forward to face the miners. "Did I hear a one say they did not understand my *compadre?* Come, brave mouth. Speak!"

Silence followed this challenge.

Toby spoke, finally, in a tired voice: "Let them make a free choice, Perico," he directed. He addressed the miners: "I advise you, as sensible men, to leave, as the *señorita* would command. Those who remain will be rewarded with hard work, and the misery of an empty belly. Make your choice."

Immediately five of them started forward. There was a momentary hesitation from the others. Then, like sheep, they followed the leaders, shrinking as far away as they could in passing the Yaqui.

"Join them, Heraclio," Toby commanded.

"No, *señor.* I beg you! This old drum lives on air and the fumes of dynamite. I stay, *señor.* Allow me."

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"Sorry," Toby regretfully decided. "This misery is not for you, old one."

He spoke to the waiting group: "Clear out, now! And stay out."

There was a spiteful pleasure in Werner's voice. "Sure, we'll clear out. And you and that Indian'll be damned hungry before we come back. Hungry and thirsty."

Perico agreed with this as they tramped back toward the winze. "For the hunger, *señor,* men like you I can live on our insides for many days. But for the thirst, *señor,* all men are about equal."

Toby laughed, kicking a spray of water from the run-off. "We have water here for an army—or does your woman's stomach retch at a little mud?"

"No, no, *señor,*" came a shrill warning from behind. "This water has the arsenic; it is death for drinking."

Toby whirled, his light falling on the ugly face of Jesus Heraclio.

"So! The old drum rolls into trouble."

"*Con permisión, señor.*"

Toby laughed. "I don't know what else I could do now, you old lion."

CHAPTER VIII

NO REST, COMPADRES, BUT GOLD

PERICO stood at the winze edge, questioning Toby with his eyes. "We will work in this manner," Toby directed. "For the drilling, Heraclio will hold while you and I swing the hammers. For the cleanup, you and I will use the shovels, Heraclio the windlass. *Es bien?*"

"It is good," the powder man agreed. "And when we have finished this little job, *compadre,* you will know as much of mining as does Perico—which, I assure you, is all that is to be known, except perhaps by Topa Chisera, the evil wizard of the underground."

"Such a big mouth," Jesus Heraclio croaked, swinging a single-jack to notch for drilling, "would make a fine pigskin for pulque."

The three of them laughed heartily at this, feeling the close comradeship of work and danger.

"If the little cat will but still the palsy of old age," Perico returned, spitting on hands for a better grip of his hammer, "I will show him a thing."

Whang! The big hammer struck true to drill head. "Pulque," he shouted. "That liquor divine."

Toby scuffed his boots to a firm stance, brought his hammer down lightly to the drill, as the Indian's rose. He caught the swinging body rhythm on the second stroke. "Pulque," he shouted, on the down swing.

They sang, in unison then, with the swinging hammers—a lusty, tuneless shouting:

Know you the pulque
Is liquor divine?
The angels in heaven
Prefer it to wine.

"Mud!" Heraclio shrilled, at the third stanza. "You two will drive this steel into the very eyes of the Devil," he grumbled, spooning rock dust from the hole.

"We will do better than that, old one," Perico boasted. "We will pin the black Devil in his hottest pit of Hell, and throw Milky-eyes of the diamond drill to join him. And now, already, I have thirst."

"Go bring the two water *ollas,*" Toby directed. "If there is enough in them for a whole gang there will be more than enough for our small needs."

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In short time Perico came sliding back down the windlass rope. "I was mistaken, *compadre,*" he said quietly, "in imagining that there was a thirst in me."

"The *ollas?*"

Perico extended his two ham-like hands, fingers crooked. "I will find that one who kicked them over," he growled. "And when I do. . ." There was no need to finish the sentence. The slow, relentless closing of those fingers was enough.

Now there was the steady clank of steel on steel. But there was no singing.

They loaded, fired the shots and waited for fumes to clear. They shoveled, and Heraclio bent his scrawny back to the windlass handle. They took turns climbing the rope to help with the loaded ore car, dumping it half-way to the main shaft. Their endurance would be spent, Toby knew, before this backfilling would reach the winze.

Hours dragged by and they spoke only when the work demanded it. Toby's wristwatch had stopped, its works scrambled by the jarring impact of sledge on drill steel. They did have a measure of time, for it was necessary to recharge their lamps at two-hour intervals. But as time wore on they lost track even of these breaks in the deadly monotony of labor.

THERE was a sullen anger about the way they worked. It was as though they hated the rock under their feet. As though they would tear it out with bare hands.

Toby had long since stripped the mechanic's coveralls from his shoulders, securing them about his waist with knotted sleeves.

Perico's shoulder had been ripped by a sharp edge of a falling rock. Blood oozed from it slowly, taking a diagonal path across the chest, from right to left. Toby wondered at this. The blood should flow straight down. But of course! It was the way his body swung with the sledge. He would explain this to the Indian after they had blasted and were waiting for the air to clear.

But when this time came he, himself, had a number of gashes. Strangely, the blood from these made an untidy splashing over his bare chest and stomach. So his reasoning wasn't so smart after all. And besides his tongue and mouth were too dry now for idle talk.

Toby was surprised to be tasting cool, sweet water. Heraclio tugged the gallon jug from his lips. "Pig!" he shouted, "you will be sick."

Things cleared in his head. They were sitting on the backfill, scooping hotly spiced *chili con carne* up in folded *tortillas.*

"And who sends this gift from heaven?" Perico was inquiring.

"It is the mystery, surely," Heraclio acknowledged. "The good saint of miners directed my footsteps to the shaft. There I find these things, hanging from a rope."

"Somebody lowered them down the shaft," Toby said brightly.

"It is God's truth," Heraclio solemnly agreed. "But who, *señor?*"

"I know," Toby said remembering. "It was Juan. The boy who works around my airplane. There is a fine boy!" he added. The food and water had an intoxicating effect on them.

"Juan?" Perico spoke from a stuffed mouth. "Ah! And to think I one time called him a grinning fool."

There was a disapproving silence.

"The poor, poor boy!" Jesus Her-

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aclio croaked, his Latin blood melting him to tears. *"Qué barabaridad!* That a a Yaqui brute should name that angel a fool!"

"Isn't it God's truth," Perico readily agreed, handicapped by his Indian's lack of tear ducts. *"Señors,* as I am a man of honors, he shall have my machete. It is a Oaxaca blade, *señors.* Steel of the very best."

"And my flying boots," Toby put in. "He shall have them, too. That fine boy has always admired them. Strange we should have been so blind to his noble qualities."

The first intoxication of water and food wore off. Perico got slowly to his feet. "I am a board," he complained. "If I bend, I break."

Toby experimented with his own stiffening muscles. "Work," he said, "will make that stiff board a willow."

They were in the shaft again, pounding on the blunted drill steel. The blast fuses were sputtering. They they were back again in the hole, choking on the acrid fumes, heads throbbing with the dynamite ache, which has no equal. Each shovelful was an effort.

Heraclio was shouting at them. It seemed as though an eternity had dragged by. *"Comida, señors.* Food . . . food! Are you deaf?"

They were again sitting on the loose rock, wolfing meat.

"It was suspended from a rope, as before," Heraclio told them, grinning like an ugly old baboon. "Water and this roast beef and—another thing."

Perico had stuffed himself to a point that he was now actually tasting the food. "I am not one to complain," he said. "And Heaven witness my gratitude, but—"

Toby nodded. "It is true, *compadre.* It must be that Juan had to cook this with his own hands. No salt."

"No pepper, no seasoning," the Indian brought in.

And burned," Heraclio added. "Burned on the outside and dripping blood from the middle. *Señors,* if my blessed esposa should cook for me a roast like this, I would beat her with the shank bone. I truly would, though I adore the very ground she walks!"

Toby crawled on hands and knees from the loose rock to the tunnel wall and there, by clinging to the rough surface, pulled himself erect. "Why do you smile?" he asked Heraclio, without anger.

The smile broadened to show toothless gums. "This old drum still booms," Heraclio said, "while you ones of the big talk squeak like mice."

"That is true, old one," Perico growled. "But if we had rested our weights these many hours on the handle of a windlass, or but lifted and turned a drill, we would now be dancing a fandango.

"Nevertheless," he added, later, when they were back at the winze, "you are a man among men." Saying this, he took another step and tumbled headfirst into the yawning hole.

He made that step during one of those blank moments that come with exhaustion.

AFTER what seemed like hours of labor they got him out of the shaft and onto a roughly formed couch they had made in the loose rock. All of this time he was conscious; grinning, commenting on their awkwardness or their weakness.

"You must have landed on that thick head," Toby commented after completing an examination. "There is nothing wrong—except this!" With feigned carelessness he pointed to the contorted lower left leg, to the bone

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fragment that had ripped through bronzed skin.

"That," Perico said coolly, "we shall cut off with my machete. One blow, *señor,* from your arm will do it."

"We will not," Toby returned. "We're going to set and splint that, *compadre.* And it's going to hurt like blazes."

When they had the splints shaped to Toby's satisfaction; had strips ready, torn from the upper part of his coveralls, Heraclio called a halt. "You asked me why I smiled, *señor,* and I made a joke of you. It is better to joke than to moan, no?"

"That is true," Toby admitted. "We understood, old one."

"Nevertheless, this is really why I smiled." The old man stooped over a rock, straightened, holding two bottles in his hands.

"Cognac!" Toby exclaimed, reading the labels. He stood for a time, holding one of the bottles. The grimness left his face. "Of course," he said, in a low voice, "and I was fool enough to doubt!"

He uncorked the bottle, handing it to Perico. The contents slid in smooth gurgles down the Indian's throat. "Ah," he murmured, the bottle two-thirds empty, "my stomach, it has never tasted such a goodly mixture, *señors.*"

Toby motioned for Heraclio to hold the Indian's body. Straddling the injured leg, his back to the Indian, he braced himself and lunged. There was a sharp crack of bones, but no sound from the injured man. Perico was still smiling when he turned. But that smile was frozen.

Toby stood up from strapping the leg. "In two months," he promised, "you'll never know that was broken, *compadre.*"

He uncorked the other bottle of cognac and divided the brandy into two equal parts. Grinning, he gestured toward the old Mexican, who had gone sound asleep while watching him work with the fractured leg. He took a deep drink from one of the bottles.

"The old drum plays a different tune," he said and, with the bottle, went stumbling toward the winze.

A blankness came over Toby's mind as he labored. Out of this there were flashes vivid enough to make their impression on his memory. There was the time when splayed steel from a drill head broke off, cutting deep into his hand. The drill was slippery after that from blood.

He heard his own voice, warning, as he loaded a cut-in hole: "Longer fuses, old boy, or you won't get out in time."

He was gagging from powder fumes, in the winze swinging a pick aimlessly. The pick sank deep into loose material. He dumped a few shovels of it into the windlass bucket. His lamp sputtered and went out.

More carbide, he thought and, moving toward the rope, sprawled full length. But his mind still worked for a little time. He climbed hand-over-hand up the rope. It was astonishingly easy. He cleaned damp sludge from his lamp. . . .

HE must have slept for some time. When he wakened there was light above him, and the sound of voices. But he put those things down to imagination. He still had to reach that vein of ore.

Fumbling around on hands and knees, he found the bottle of cognac and drained it. He got to his feet and made one swing with the pick before the brandy shocked him back to re-

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ality. He knew then that there were actually people up there on the winze rim.

"All right," he said heavily. "I'll come up."

"Drop that gun first," Werner's voice commanded.

Toby ignored the command, tried to pull himself up on the windlass rope.

"Put your feet in the bucket, Toby. Wrap your arms around the rope. Tightly!"

It was Roberta's voice. He would have to thank her for the things she'd done. He'd been so foolish not to understand about Werner. It had been his own fault, the way she'd flirted with the other.

Jennings' voice brought him fully awake and alert.

"Fifty-two hours," he snapped. "That's a damned long shift!"

"How'd you get back?" Toby asked Jennings.

"I waited a day and a half, then rode three horses almost to death, getting here. That was quite a stunt you pulled Toby."

"'Fraid you'd get into trouble, Bob."

"I know. But what about this trouble down here?"

Toby lowered his weary body onto a rock. Roberta was fussing over him with a moist handkerchief, trying to wipe the blood from his face and chest.

"Just trying to play hero," Werner cut in.

"But you *did* send a sample in," Toby accused Werner, without much heat.

"He couldn't," Jennings said positively. "I even measured core lengths on him."

"Yeah. But remember, Werner had been drilling at the old Baranda mine. Same rock structure. He just palmed some of that off on you, Bob."

"That's a lie!" Werner said stepping forward with clenched fists.

"I suppose," Roberta said coolly, "that you wouldn't be too proud to fight, Mr. Werner—now that Toby's dead on his feet."

"Stop that foolishness!" Jennings commanded. "Go ahead, Toby."

"Well, he gave me a book to take to Esteban. I looked it over, but not very close. I gave Esteban the other book by mistake. That's why he broke into my room with a mozo from the Latino company, trying to find the book with the core sample."

"The book with . . .?"

"Sure. He measured off enough leaves of the book to make the thickness of a core section. Cut a hole in them, large enough to hold the sample and glued them together. Only the glue came loose; sample fell out and got under the floorboard."

"The trouble with that lying story," Werner snapped, "is that you haven't found the vein."

Roberta's words brought from them a gasp of astonishment. "But he did find the vein," she said composedly. "Down there in that hole."

"Please, Bobby," Toby begged. "This thing's messed up enough."

"But didn't you realize?" She laughed happily. She reached a slender hand into the ore bucket. Toby saw the angry red blisters on the palm. He was so concerned about these that he hardly noticed the dull gleaming specks in the rock she held up to them.

"He dug way into the vein, and didn't know it."

"Grab him!" Jennings shouted, as Werner started full speed toward the waiting shaft-cage.

"Let him go," Toby advised. "I'll take my ship out tomorrow and head him off in two hours."

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ROBERTA had given over trying to get Toby into presentable condition, apparently satisfied with him as he was.

"A miner," she told him, "always has a little blood and mud on him. Bob always has, and he's a pretty good miner, too."

"You not only rustled food and water for us," Toby said, "but you lowered it down the shaft yourself. Plucky kid!"

"How did you know?"

"Your hands, sweet." He pressed the blistered palms to his lips.

"But you knew before that. I could tell, because you didn't move away from me and get all hateful and stiff."

"Yes, I knew before that. First, I wondered how in the world Juan got hold of that cognac. Tequila, yes. But cognac, no."

"And second?"

"Sweet, I hate to tell you this. But even Juan couldn't ruin a piece of meat as you did that roast. It was terrible!"

"It *was* a little burned," she admitted ruefully.

"But I couldn't trust anybody. You know how these servants love gossip."

"But why did you do it, kid? When you thought I didn't know what I was doing. When you thought I was ruining your dad's mine?"

"Well," she began, thoughtfully, "when a woman is in love with a man —that is, terribly in love with him— well, she just . . . oh, you wouldn't understand, Toby." She put her arms around him. "You just simply wouldn't understand."

"Fine!" Toby said, before kissing her. "What man wants to understand the woman he loves?"

THE END

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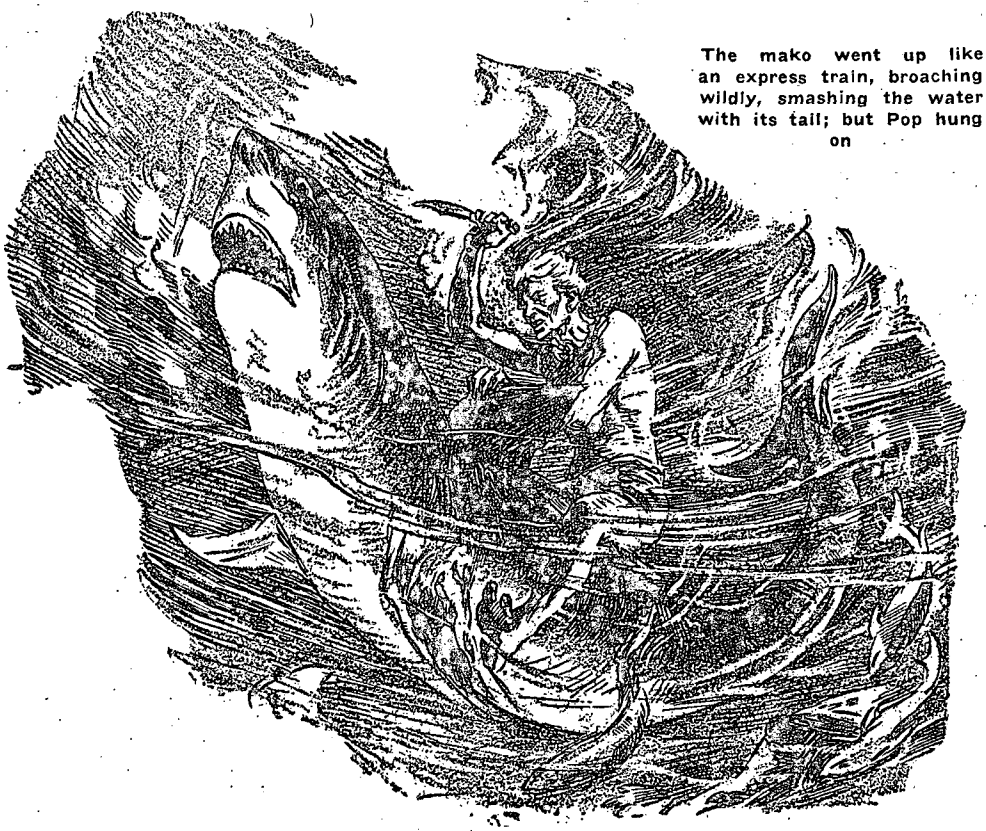

The mako went up like an express train, broaching wildly, smashing the water with its tail; but Pop hung on

Tildy Was a Lady

Concerning that intelligent and amiable porpoise, Matilda: her enigmatic illness, her coyness before a shark, and the startling outcome of her intelligence and amiability

By RICHARD SALE
Author of "Fish Ain't Got No Brains," "The Rogue," etc.

STORIES get around. Before a week had passed, most of Florida knew the yarn, and within a month the nation knew it. The thing was appealing.

Here was a hard-bitten old boy named Pop Shannon, who was head of the administration of the Underwater Zoo, a guy who had fished waters from the Mississippi Sound (sometimes called the Gulf of Mexico) all the way around the hook of Florida, past Hatteras, past Sandy Hook and Cape Cod, clear north to Louisburg in Nova Scotia where the swordfish run.

He had said publicly and often that "fish ain't got no brains"; and he had been proved wrong by the action of Matilda.

Not only had he been proved wrong,

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but his life had been saved. For Matilda the porpoise had fought off the blue shark when Pop Shannon was down in the water, helpless. Not only had she fought off the shark, but she proved her heart belonged to Pop by shoving him topside again under her own power so that he could fill his lungs with air.

You probably read all this is your local paper, or else you saw the pictures in that big ten-cent foto magazine. They sent photographers down to Laconia after that first incident, and they took pictures of Matilda and Pop Shannon, and the shark, and the Underwater Zoo.

And Laconia had a small boom.

Pop Shannon was amazed. For the publicity brought thousands of visitors to the marineland. It was situated on the through highway from Miami to Key West at Laconia, a miracle of concrete. Pop himself didn't know whose idea it had been in the beginning, and he didn't much care.

But a group of wealthy sportsmen had had an idea that it would be scientifically interesting to build a giganic pool on dry land and place in it all the fishes of the sea, together, so that they might pursue their mode of life beneath the watchful eyes of ichthyologists who could record their findings.

Pop Shannon didn't know how to pronounce ichthyologists, and he didn't want to learn. All he knew was fish, and it was his job to keep them healthy in the Underwater Zoo.

As for keeping them alive, that was something else again. You couldn't count on that. The mullet ate the small fry, the bluefish ate the mullet, the tuna ate the bluefish, the shark ate the tuna, and the loggerhead ate the shark. That was life under water.

The Underwater Zoo was built in the shape of an egg, and it rose three tiers above the level of the ground. You climbed up stairs to reach the top and when you did, you found yourself looking at an enormous swimming pool. It really looked that harmless. Blue water, calm and serene, and not a sign of a fish.

AND then you went down a tier and looked in through the waterproof portholes, and you got a faint idea of how unhealthy the place really was in there. For besides the others mentioned, there were a manta, a five-hundred-pound sawfish, a giant jewfish, hammerheads, nurse, blue, and tiger sharks, along with octopi and great eels, all moving in seemingly slow motion through a vale of green water, submarine flora floating eerily around their paths.

Pop Shannon liked the crowds and he liked the people who plied him with questions.

"Yes, sir," Pop would say, "I reckon I've fished about every hunk o' water from Galveston t' Louisburg, and I always felt kinda bad that I couldn't get down to the South Seas for some o' that striped marlin down there.

"But I given it all up now. I take care o' the fish here in the zoo, and the only fishing I get is when we has to replace a speciment. Then we goes off-shore and brings 'em back alive. Got a special boat for it and everything."

The most popular query was: "Did that porpoise really save your life, Mr. Shannon? And is her name really Matilda?"

"Son," said Pop Shannon quietly, "she really done that. And Tildy is her name. I reckon I owe Tildy plenty o' thanks and I can't make it up by stuffin' her with mullet either.

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"That there porpoise has got more brains than most human beings. I'll swear she understands English!

"Yes, you shoulda seen her fight off that shark, son; it was something t' see. She ploughed into him like a Roman ram, she did, and if'n he hadn't been near all muscle, she'd have busted him clean in two. Boy, did she hit him!"

"Do you still go down, Mr. Shannon?"

"Course I still go down," Pop said, annoyed. "I'm no old fogy, son. By God and glory, I'm this side o' fifty-eight which is comparatively young, ain't it? I can still ride a shark's back and make 'im hump himself. I wouldn't of got into trouble that day if'n I hadn't gone with a helmet. You can't move round well with a helmet.

"But I can handle a shark, I can. Alone. And you don't have no helmet. You dive in with a dagger and you ride him and that's all there is to it."

"Are you going to give a demonstration, Mr. Shannon?"

"Hell no," said Pop Shannon dryly. "If'n I was to go divin' in and ridin' the sharks and killin' them all off, it'd get kinda expensive. Every shark I killed, I'd have to go out and get a new one. That's work."

Wally Sherman was Pop's younger assistant. Pop always said that Wally was a nice kid. Young Sherman, Pop called him, although Wally was thirty years old. Young Sherman was an expert on fish diseases and fungi, and it was he who was in charge of the disinfectant tanks and curative measures for sick fish.

After Matilda saved Pop's life, Pop always told young Sherman that he owed Tildy everything, and that he would personally look out for her.

But not even Pop knew what to do when Tildy began ailing.

IN THOSE days, at the height of the the Laconia boom when the thousands of transients flocked to the Underwater Zoo, the history of sick porpoises was a meager monograph indeed. Pop admitted that Wally Sherman knew as much about the finny clan as could be known, particularly from a scientific point of view. And Wally Sherman was stumped.

"I can't understand it, Pop," young Sherman said, worried. "The life is going out of Tildy. She's losing her pep. She doesn't swim much anymore, just sulks down in the shadows. I've been down and looked her over, but I couldn't find any fungus at all. I'm absolutely stumped, Pop. I don't know what's wrong with her."

Pop Shannon said, anxiously, "You don't reckon it's serious, Wally? You don't think there porpoise would die?"

"I don't know what it is," said young Sherman. "She's a sick porpoise, that's all that's evident. I can't tell you whether it's old age or tonsils, but she might die. Who can tell?"

"Not Tildy," Pop said, his voice choking. "Tildy couldn't go dyin' on us. Why, I'd rather see any one of them beasts kick in as long as she hung around here and that's a fact."

"She's sick," said young Sherman. "She's a sick girl."

It was too bad, really: for business boomed, the money rolled into the till, and Pop Shannon even had a raise. But his own zest began to go, and the transients did not even find him civil. He was only the white-haired man with the gaunt grim face who lolled around the edge of the pool on the upper tier, peering in for Tildy, looking as if he were ailing himself; for his eyes were dark, and he brooded.

After a time, Matilda no longer came to the surface except for air. Pop

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could stand there, dangling a silvery fat mullet over the water. In other days, she would have come up from the bottom with the speed of an express train, broaching in a burst of milky water, smashing the surface white with her tail as she stood on it, mouth open, and reached for the bait. Why, Pop had to watch his hand sometimes, she came up so hard and fast, and it made a spectacular show for the visitors. You could always depend upon Tildy.

You could always depend on her up to the morning when she quit her feeding. Pop hung over the pool, calling her and waving the best mullet he could find, but there was no flashing burst of speed, no nozzling head, no sign of her face which seemed to grin.

Wally Sherman shrugged. "I can't even find her through the ports," he said, "and I've been all over the place, from every angle. I'm afraid Tildy is one dead porpoise, Pop."

"No," said Pop Shannon, looking ten years older. "I don't believe it."

"I've looked everywhere," said Sherman. "Really, Pop."

Pop Shannon's eyes were moist. "Are you tryin' to say a shark got her —or the logger?"

Sherman said, "I'm sorry, but what else can we think? I tell you I can't find her in the tank. She didn't have much pep. If she got in a fight with the mako, she was a gone goose. That mako is a hard boy."

"If that mako shark killed Tildy," said Pop Shannon coldly, "s'help me, I'll go down and carve his liver out with my bare hands!"

Young Sherman laughed quietly. "Don't take on so, Pop," he said. "I liked Matilda as well as anyone did; but after all, she's only a porpoise. There are lots of porpoises in the sea and we can get another one."

Pop Shannon glowered at him. Poking a finger into his chest, Pop said in a low voice, "They may be lotsa porpoises in the sea, Mr. Sherman, but there is only one Tildy that saved my life, and it does seem like I could save her life in return if'n she's sick.

"That mako shark never got her. She's down there somewhere, sick and sulking, and I think I got an idea where. Do you look hard under the coral ridge where that sea kelp is thick?"

"Well," said young Sherman, "I *looked*. I may not have looked hard because the angles from the ports are bad on that point, and she could lay in the kelp—"

"Get me a helmet," Pop Shannon said. "I'm going down."

"I'll go down," said Sherman. "After all, I could have made a mistake."

"Get me the helmet," said Pop grimly. "Tildy is my porpoise, she done me right, and if'n anyone is gonna fix her up, it's me!"

THE diving helmet was a self-contained unit weighing forty pounds. Airlines were unnecessary; you just placed it over your head and went down. Lifelines were not necessary either, since there were descending rungs at various points around the pool.

Sherman put the helmet over Pop's head after Pop had changed to trunks. Then he slapped the unit on top once as a signal, and Pop, with a forked iron prong in his right hand, started down.

It was early, and there were not many visitors at the Underwater Zoo; but Pop saw a face or two at the ports as he descended, and he waved to them. It was always thrilling to be waved to from a man in the depths.

The world became a deep soft un-

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dulating green, growing darker as he went down. Bonito, mackerel and wahoo swam by him. There went a gorgeous amberjack of fifty pounds or so. The loggerhead moved slowly by, ignoring him. The blue shark flashed by and away, afraid of his bubbles and the iron prong.

On the bottom, Pop paused and glanced around. The small fry swept away from him for the shelter of abalone, and he began to walk, head down.

In the center of the pool was an artifically old wreck where the groupers and red snappers lolled, in brilliant colors. The great shadow of the sluggish jewfish passed over him and was gone.

Pop circled the wreck and moved toward the coral shelf where the seaweed waved to and fro. Undulating seaweed always made him think of the sirens of Homer's Odyssey, because they beckoned in much the same persuasive manner that the sirens probably had.

Then Pop paused.

The mako shark was a recent addition to the tank. Pop himself had hooked this specimen, close to Bimini, and had brought the monster to gaff. Only, instead of gaffing the brute, they had hauled him into the bottom of the boat where the sea-water tank was, and they had taken the hook from his jaw, and brought him back to Laconia alive.

He was a giant of the sea, a horrific tiger. The mako is one of the few members of the shark family which ranks as a game fish. He has courage, he has strength, and he has a nasty disposition.

This giant weighed seven hundred and fifty pounds, with a spark snout, and the most ghastly set of double-rowed ivories a man ever looked upon. The teeth of the mako shark are like a nightmare, large triangles set in jaws so powerful as to be awesome.

The ease with which the loggerhead snapped fish in two was nothing compared to the power of the mako's jaws, for makos had bitten through steel chain. . . .

Pop paused because the mako was skirting the coral shelf himself, his sinister green belly above Pop's head. Pop crouched down low in the sand with the prong extended for a jab.

Pop's heart was beating hard. He told himself it was the exertion of moving underwater, and the fact that he was no spring chicken, but this wasn't so. He was in sterling physical condition, despite his age, his body tanned, muscular and firm.

His heart beat faster because he knew that the prong wouldn't work with a fish the size of the mako. The mako could snap it out of his hands.

But the mako wasn't interested in Pop. The mako was stalking the coral shelf, where the kelp grew thickest. Pop let his eyes move off the great white shark for a moment, and peered into the kelp. The seaweed had a deceptive coloration, and it made a fine protective screen, but presently Pop discerned the snout of Matilda.

SHE was there. Pop felt cautious elation. Watching hard, he saw her head and eyes. She was watching the mako, and not moving much. Now and then the mako would shoot down over the ridge and start to turn on his back, and when this happened, Matilda would poke her head out of the kelp quickly, as if she were going to run for it.

Pop was aghast. Matilda was a sick porpoise to behave like that, because there wasn't another fish in the tank that she was afraid of.

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Why should she be afraid? She could outswim that mako a mile. She was faster, she weighed a hundred fifty pounds more than he did, and she could deliver such lightning blows by ramming that she could all but break him in half.

Still, she was afraid. And the mako wasn't. The mako had her number. And the big shark was just waiting for the kill and getting very impatient.

Pop moved away slowly. He walked backwards. Underwater, you can get places much faster by walking backwards, and you don't look as clumsy. He retreated, watching the mako. The mako paid no attention to him.

Pop felt along the cement wall, found the rungs close by, and went up them. None of his movements were abrupt. He slowly climbed to the top.

Young Sherman was waiting for him, and lifted the helmet off Pop's shoulders at once. Sherman snapped, "You were a fool to take that chance. That mako is on the warpath!"

"I know it," Pop said. "Did you see Tildy? She's down there in the kelp. She's ailin', and the big shark knows it. He's layin' for her."

"Of course he is," said Sherman. "You were risking your life just hanging around. The mako knows she's down, and he knows she can't do anything. What on earth is wrong with her, I can't imagine, but whatever it is, her fighting days are over, and the mako is going to make sure her breathing days are over too!"

Pop Shannon said, "Get me that knife o' yours, Wally."

"What knife?" Sherman said. "You mean my big hunting knife?"

"Uh-huh," Pop said. "The one with the nice bayonet blade. You get me that one, will you, Wally? I'm goin' down again."

"You're crazy!" said young Sherman. "You're not going down there again until that thing is over. The mako won't wait much longer; I was watching him. He'll go in after her and flush Matilda out in a few minutes, and then he'll swamp her. Her whole fight is in her speed, and she doesn't have any speed."

"Listen, Wally," said Pop Shannon, "I know what I'm doin', see? Tildy is been down there a long time, and she needs air. That mako, he's holdin' her there and when she goes for air, he'll go for her. He's stalkin' her t'drown her. She ain't no fish, regularly speakin', but a mammal."

"There's nothing you can do about it," said Sherman frantically. "You're mad to think—"

"I know what I can do about it," said Pop Shannon. "Sure, maybe I'm in my second childhood, maybe I'm a fool; but dawgone, Wally, Tildy saved my life once. She did it plain and on purpose. It wasn't no accident.

"I'm mighty fond o' that porpoise, son, and I don't figger to stand by and see that blamed old mako eat her up. There's plenty of mako sharks in the oceans, too dang many o' them, but there's only one Tildy, and I'm gonna see that she sticks around this earthly plane a little longer."

"You can't fight that shark," said Sherman.

"Listen," Pop cried, exasperated. "I've fought many a shark in my time, just me and a knife and a shark in the sea. There's a trick to it, and I know the trick. I never fought one that big but a shark is a shark. When you get his liver, he wilts, and that's a fact. So get me your dagger and shut up, Wally, because that's what I'm gonna do and you can't stop me."

"I won't do it," Sherman snapped.

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Pop thrust past him and went into the administration office and took the knife out of the scabbard on the wall. It was a seven-inch blade of the finest Swedish steel, and the grip was so balanced that the blade sat neatly between your teeth without much jaw action on your part.

When Pop came back, Sherman grabbed him and tried to haul him away. You would have thought the younger man could do it too, for Sherman was no shrimp; but Pop jabbed him hard in the stomach, and when Sherman said, "Woof," and released his grip on Pop, Pop gripped the dagger between his teeth, stepped to the edge of the pool, and dove in without another word.

A GOOD man can stay down three minutes. But Pop knew he was past those days. Two and a half was his limit, and he did not waste any time. He kicked down as hard as he could, and as the water grew darker, he felt his eyes popping open wide. His teeth ground on the knife. No losing that now.

Presently the coral shelf appeared, and above it hovered the mako. Pop got below the shark and waited, holding his position, but the mako was wary and would not attack.

There was the problem.

Pop could hold his breath only so long, and then he would go up. He had to make the shark attack while he was strong on the wind. He peered down, saw Matilda in the kelp. She was moving painfully, and Pop thought she soon would burst for want of air.

But that was the way, he suddenly said to himself. If Tildy could be made to surface for fresh air, the mako would follow her to destroy her. And Pop Shannon would ride the mako.

Pop swam lower, eased himself into the kelp and felt Tildy beneath him. Her snout came up and touched him and he slapped her side, but she would not budge. He pushed but it was no good. Porpoises are big and heavy and strong and she would have none of it.

Pop took the knife from his mouth and jabbed her in the back, and up she went like a flash, with something of her old vim and speed.

It is an odd but true fact that most big fish will surface when you stab them, however slightly.

But Pop had already kicked himself clear of the kelp as Tildy left. He saw her torpedo-like body flashing up, and he saw the mako turn on its tail and start up after her.

Pop was going up himself then and he went up under the shark. The mako saw him and tried to roll on its back, but the shark played into his hands; for Pop grabbed the dorsal as it came over and sank his teeth into it and hung on, frantically trying to wrap his legs around the body.

It was touch and go but he made it, and he was clinging to the back of the shark, teeth in the dorsal, hands digging at the gill base, legs locked around the belly and rubbed raw by the skin of the shark, akin to emery paper.

The mako sounded abruptly, heading for the wreck. Pop knew he would be swept off the back if they hit that wreck; and besides, his lungs were bursting for air, and lights were flashing before his eyes.

He pulled the knife from between his teeth, and gripping it firmly he reached down and plunged it into the belly of the shark and twisted it hard. The mako went up like an express train, broached wildly, and smashed at the water with its tail.

Pop hung on. He not only hung on,

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but he got some clean air; and when they went down again, he began to pull the knife toward him, still imbedded in the brute.

The pool was in an uproar, for the blood of the shark was graying up the waters, and the 'cudas and other sharks were milling about madly. The blade reached the mako's liver, and then the fight went out of him, and he began to wilt and sink.

POP got out of there. He released his grip, taking the knife with him, and clawed at the water to go up. When he broke surface, young Sherman grabbed him by the hand and hauled him out bodily.

"My God!" Sherman screamed. "You should see the mess! They're tearing him to bits! You had a close call! The barracuda followed you—"

"Tildy," said Pop Shannon, panting. "Did Tildy get some air?"

Sherman stared at the man. "Air?" And then he relaxed and quieted, and he let the visitors do the yelling about the underwater fight that was still going on, as the cannabalistic clan devoured one of their own. "Yes, Pop, Matilda surfaced and got some air, and then went down again."

"She didn't stay up?"

"No, Pop, she went right down again."

Pop sighed heavily, still panting. "I had to jab her," he said. "I hope she ain't sore at me. But I had to do it to get her out. That mako—"

He shook his head, and left the upper tier and went down to a port which had a view of the coral shelf and the sea kelp.

There was Matilda again, her head barely visible in the weeds, lolling in the same position.

"Well," Pop groaned, "I give up. I guess she's a sick porpoise. But at least she'll be able to get some air now. She can still handle any of the others in the tank." And he trudged off to the building to change his clothes. But young Sherman could see he was gravely disappointed.

. . . For three days, Pop Shannon wasn't fit to live with. He would put on the helmet and go down and try to get near Tildy but she wouldn't let him come too close. She would just loll there until she wanted fresh air, and then she would surface, and descend again and take up her place there.

On the fourth morning, Pop Shannon came out with the usual batch of silvery mullet. He still tried. Once Matilda would have eaten every one of the fish from his hand, but now he had to drop them into the pond and let them sink to her level.

He stood there and slapped a fish on the water and waved it and he called, "Hildy, Tildy, come and get it! Fish, fish, fish!"

A shadow moved in the depths. The next minute there was a burst of foam, a geyser of spray, and then a pair of torpedos shot into the air, nozzling against each other for the outstretched mullet. There was a splash as one won, and then both fell back again.

Pop Shannon cried, "Wally!"

Wally Sherman came running, pale. "What is it, Pop?"

"Wally!" Pop roared, stunned. There are two of them! Two of them!"

"Two of what?" Sherman gasped, alarmed.

But Pop took two mullets and held them over the pool. And up came Matilda on the left side for the left mullet, and up came another porpoise, much smaller, weighing perhaps seventy-five pounds or so, to take the mullet on the right side.

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"Two porpoises!" Sherman exclaimed. "But how—"

"Don't you see?" Pop laughed, his eyes bright with enthusiasm. "A fine fish man you turned out to be! Don't you see, son, don't you see? Tildy was a lady, and she hasn't spent her whole life in this tank. She'd been around.

And she's had herself a baby, and that's him! That's why she wouldn't run around and play and fight. She was having herself a young porpoise! And the mako knew it; he was out to get her—"

"Well I'll be a nasty word," Sherman said.

And Pop Shannon felt so good, he not only agreed with young Sherman, but he nearly knocked Sherman into the water, patting him on the back; and he wondered, in the back of his mind, whether or not there were cigars in the office desk to pass around to the visitors.

English Archers Battle French Men-at-arms

in Roy de S. Horn's stirring new story of

ROBIN THE BOMBARDIER

Beginning in the April 27 Argosy

Thrills Galore!
Excitement in Store!!

The Silver Buck

Enemy of the lawless, . . . champion of the oppressed, . . . brings justice to the rangeland and exciting thrills to you in a brand-new western story magazine.

Western
DIME NOVELS

Now at the best stands!

←The Hallmark of Quality Fiction is on the cover!

If your dealer is sold out, send 10¢ to 280 Broadway, New York City and a copy will be mailed to you.

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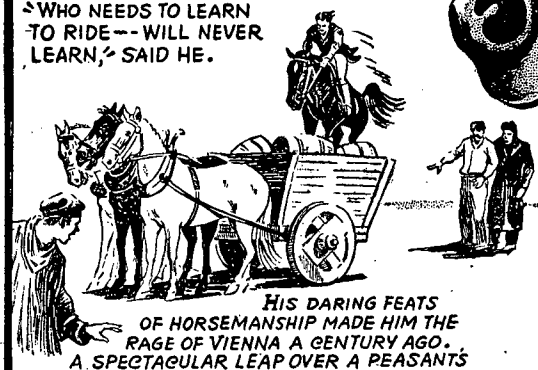
MEN of DARING

The Devil's Riding Master

COUNT SANDOR, WHO HAS BEEN CALLED THE GREATEST HORSEMAN OF ALL TIME, WAS FORBIDDEN TO RIDE AS A BOY. UPON HIS FATHER'S DEATH, HE AT ONCE BOUGHT A THOROUGHBRED, SPRANG ON ITS BACK AND WAS OFF, AMAZING ONLOOKERS PRESENTLY BY REMOVING THE SADDLE AND JUMPING A 5-BAR GATE!

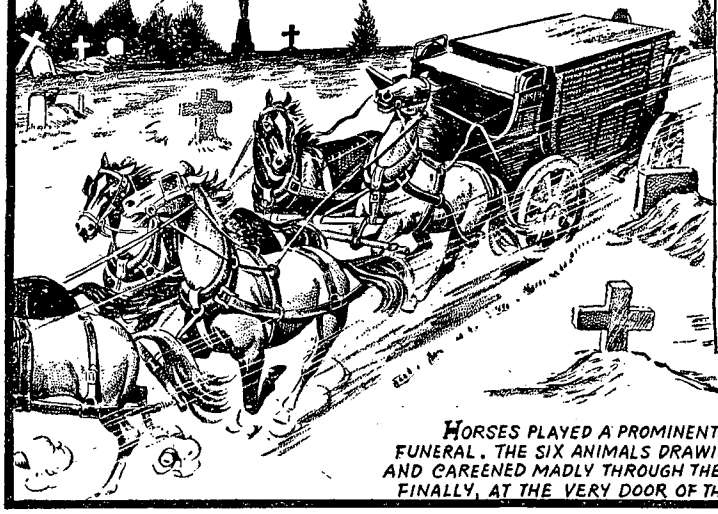
"WHO NEEDS TO LEARN TO RIDE--WILL NEVER LEARN," SAID HE.

Count Moritz Sandor



HIS DARING FEATS OF HORSEMANSHIP MADE HIM THE RAGE OF VIENNA A CENTURY AGO. A SPECTACULAR LEAP OVER A PEASANT'S CART DRAWN BY 3 HORSES EARNED HIM THE TITLE OF "THE DEVIL'S RIDING MASTER."

ONCE AN UNTRIED STEED BOLTED AND PLUNGED INTO A STONE QUARRY. WITH SUPERB SKILL HE TURNED THE ANIMAL IN MID-AIR AND SAVED HIS LIFE! CONFINED TO BARRACKS, HE HURDLED HIS HORSE OVER THE CROSSED BAYONETS OF HIS SENTRIES AND WENT A.W.O.L.



HORSES PLAYED A PROMINENT PART EVEN AT HIS FUNERAL. THE SIX ANIMALS DRAWING HIS HEARSE RAN AWAY AND CAREENED MADLY THROUGH THE STREETS--STOPPING, FINALLY, AT THE VERY DOOR OF THE FAMILY VAULT!

A True Story in Pictures Every Week

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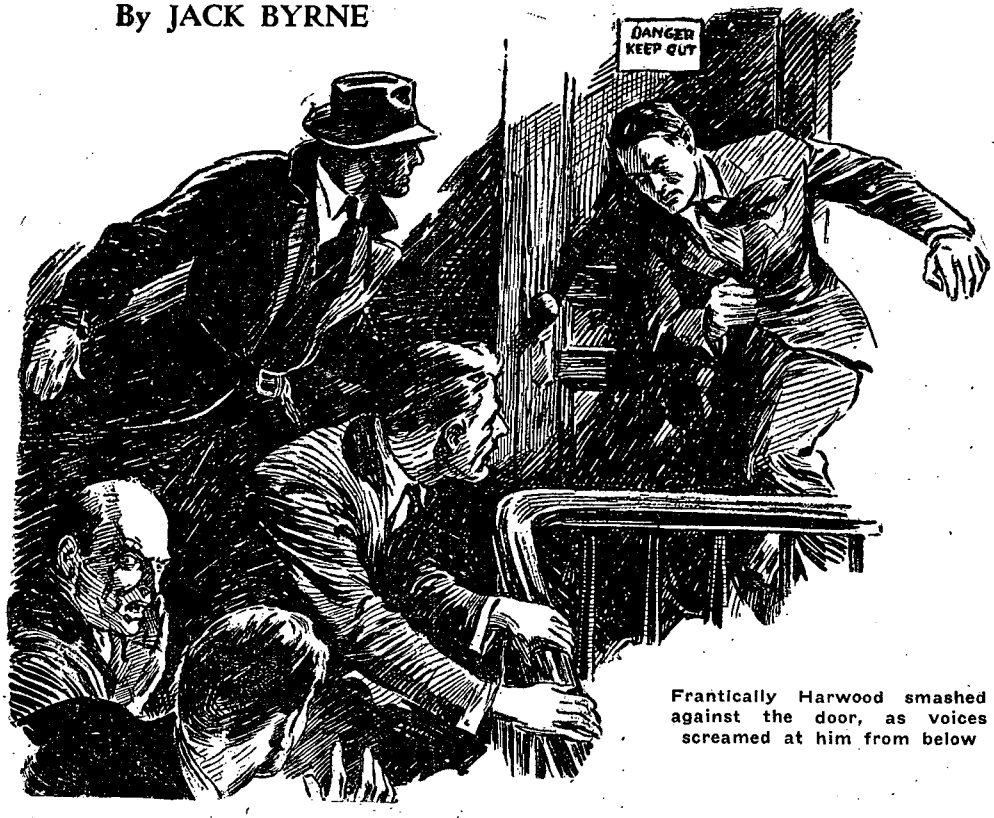
$1000 Every Thursday

By JACK BYRNE



Frantically Harwood smashed against the door, as voices screamed at him from below

THOSE fabulous blue checks from KATY BELLE, the resurrected mining corporation, have already brought startling changes to the lives of three persons, and taken the life of a fourth. There are two more to go.

Bearer of the news that leaves happiness, ironic comedy, or tragedy in its wake is the young attorney THOMAS HARWOOD, who has taken the job of running down the original investors or their heirs for

JONAS G. GALWAY, buccaneer of finance, who plans to show up the government and trim his income taxes by giving a thousand dollars every week to each of a chosen few.

SUSAN GALWAY, old J. G.'s attractive and peppery niece, is acting as liaison officer—and complicating Harwood's job by her frank attempts to arouse his romantic interest. This ought to be easy; but Harwood is mindful of the Galway millions, and hence wary.

HARWOOD'S latest trip has been satisfactory. A small-town boy, JERRY STONER, was almost bilked of his thousand-a-week by the town big shots; but he came to his senses in time to marry the girl he'd been engaged to. Harwood cheerfully got up at three in the morning or thereabouts to go to the wedding.

But there is one angle of this business that troubles them all—J. G., Susan, and Harwood alike. Old Doc PICKERING, sole survivor of Galway's original mining partners, has been receiving his checks but not cashing them. And not a word out of him.

To make the thing all the stranger, J. G. announces that he will personally handle the Pickering case.

Galway appears to have an uneasy suspicion of the reason for Pickering's silence; but Susan is unable to get anything out of him. . . .

This story began in the Argosy for March 23

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CHAPTER XV

RETREAT FROM SUSAN

SCIENCE is a wonderful thing and mankind owes a thousand boons to modern invention. There are occasions nevertheless when a woman thanks her stars that automatic two-way television is still a blue-print dream of the laboratories.

A cold had bepinked Susan's nose and puffed her eyes, and no matter how much cheer and enthusiasm she tried to pump into her voice she continued to sound as sepulchral—the simile was her own devisement—as a mooing raven. She smothered a sneeze.

J. G. Galway came into the sun room from the terrace and frowned at his cane as he tabled it. He said, "Haremmm. I thought you were talking to Harwood."

"We were cut off." Susan sniffed. "The operator will ring me back."

"It's a good thing he managed to get out of that Chicago mess with as little delay as he had. A terrible business, terrible. Sometimes I wonder—"

"What, Uncle Josh?"

"Never mind. How did this one go?"

"He's all pepped up again," said Susan mournfully. "I've never heard him sound so romantic. He keeps describing the ecstatic look on the faces of young Stoner and his girl and the way he kept holding her hand as if he'd never let loose.

"Some old judge presided over the ceremony in his nightcap and insisted on serving the wedding breakfast in his kitchen. The happy couple depart tomorrow on their honeymoon in their new second-hand roadster."

Her great-uncle gave her a speculative scowl, stretching his arms as he sat.

"You know," he said, "it's funny the way this thing is working out. I've been thinking it over, cooped up here the way I've been, and it gives a man some queer notions when he sees the effect a little money has on people. What I chiefly intended when this scheme popped into my mind—"

"You wanted to beat the tax-grabbers, wasn't that it?"

"That was the main idea. And the more the lawyers check into it the sounder it looks."

He waggled his head with satisfaction. "Those pink professors won't like it—a man playing Santa Claus with his own money instead of handing it over to them to dole out—but I'll show 'em in the courts."

Susan glanced dolefully at the telephone, arranging papers on the desk. "But what about your big political schemes?"

"Aha!" He rubbed his hands. "Honey, I couldn't have planned it better. They know we got 'em cornered on that Wheelock Bill, that it's licked right now. The Katy Belle publicity was small potatoes maybe, but it helped.

"We've got our own convention sewed up and our candidate hand-picked. The platform will write itself. And *their* convention will be the most awful squabble since Garfield smashed Grant's third-term bubble in 1878."

Susan nodded politely. They could nominate Jojo the Dog-Faced Boy and it wouldn't matter to her. Not the way she was feeling right now.

"I may take a trip to Washington in a week or ten days," he said. "I want to sound out sentiment—but that's neither here nor there. I've got a bigger problem than that. It's you, Susy, and my money when I die. I've been doing quite a bit of figuring."

It was an old discussion. (If he

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wambles into that again right now, she thought, I'll blurst into screeling hystorics.) Before her was the Katy Belle portfolio, a duplicate of the master record that Thomas Harwood had. She opened it hastily.

"I want to get this Wilhelm business straightened out for him," she said. "The connection will come through any minute. This is the one, you recall, on which we got the necessary information after he left town. Didn't you say he was to trace the man down through a reporter?"

"Something like that," Galway said. "He'll know what to do. . . . Old Ludwig Wilhelm, huh? He was a blacksmith. Blacksmiths are supposed to be big fellows but he wouldn't weigh much over a hundred pounds. What happened to him?"

Susan read from the sheet: "Ludwig Wilhelm, native Stuttgart, Germany, naturalized citizen question mark. Ironworker Amarillo, Texas, where died 1910. Unmarried. Next to kin—"

She sneezed.

"He had a queer way of talking," J. G. mused, "and the palest blue eyes you ever saw. I remember one time me and Dock Pickering—"

"And what about *that* little business?" Susan said quickly. "Your old friend the doctor still hasn't cashed a single check. What's wrong with the man?"

J. G. Galway stretched his toe gingerly. "Doc's a philosopher. I was thinking the other night about an argument we had. But I'll handle that when I get around to it. I'm feeling better every day. How does that Wilhelm business narrow down? Who comes in for old Ludwig's share?"

"A nephew." She released a sheet of paper and passed it across.

He read:

KARL WILHELM: (Bro of above, now deceased) For infrmtn re K W's son, same name, see Joel Lucas, Portland News-Record.

"Why that's one of my papers," he said. "Who's Joel Lucas? Never heard of him. Have Fosdick find out who he is."

He observed the eager movement of Miss Susan's arm at the first tinkle of the telephone and the alteration of her features as she began to speak. Reluctantly he resumed his cane and his constitutional along the terrace.

She was laughing when he looked in again after twenty minutes of grudging exercise in the shoe especially designed for his vulnerable toe. Her eyes were bright and her voice sounded better.

If the confounded doctors could only bottle that, he thought.

Susan smiled at him. "He's heading for Portland pronto, and after that he'll come back here. . . . I do think my cold is a little better."

•

THE rain splashed steadily on the windows and the ground-mists transformed the wooded slopes into a wonder-book forest where the cauldrons of the witch woman bubbled and steamed and hunched magicians wove fog with stolen moonbeams to cast their mystic spells.

The train was a dragon-worm that crawled the haunted valley, a scuttling beetle that any of the mountain giants could crush with a careless toe.

"It's the Cascades yonder that catch this rainfall," said the weather-beaten man in the recreation car. "Over east where my place is we don't see a rain like this in a month of Sundays."

"My four hearts, partner," a bridge-playing dowager remarked, "was the

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Blockwood response. You had no right to raise the suit whatever."

"You New York fellows," said the pharmacist from Wenatchee to Thomas Harwood, "don't rightly know what the real outdoors is like. Just wait till you see the country up north. Timber, wheat, fruit, ore—we got everything out here, mister.

"Be the sensible thing, I often say, to move the population on out here and give the land east of the Rockies back to the Indians."

The man from Cincinnati grunted. "If the government keeps spending our money on you fellows," he said, "we'll have to move. Subsidies, projects, conservation—we pay the taxes and you get the gravy! A billion dollars for dams and fish-ladders!

"Nobody gives a hoot about the Ohio flooding twice a year and ruining our homes and our business but it's nothing to spend another half a billion or so to give a handful of you farmers electric stoves and inside plumbing and irrigation ditches."

"Hold on there, friend! Why in fifty years from now—"

"No sir, he's right," said a bridge kibitzer, joining them. "I'm from Nashville myself and up to now I've always voted the straight ticket. I'm for progress, yes, but those smart boys in Washington are carrying things too far.

"It took the country three hundred years to grow the way it is and you can't change it over in thirty minutes. Take that Wheelock Bill now—"

Many spoke at once. Each man was ready with comment vociferous:

"It's nothing but old Doc Townsend's scheme in a new set of whiskers!"

"Campaign fodder, that's all it is. Those congressmen are scared of their jobs. They're afraid the pension crowd can swing the fall elections."

"Ruin business, that's what it will. We're up to our necks in debt already."

"The dollar wouldn't be worth a penny," rumbled one hoarse basso. "Might as well go the whole hog and make it a thousand a week like those folks you read about in the papers."

Harwood listened, watching the faces. From the Hudson to the Gulf, from ocean to ocean across, he had heard the topic discussed.

In restaurant, lobby and barber shop, in taxis and terminals, he had harkened to the opinions of salesmen, farmers, butchers, brokers, the haves and have-nots alike.

The Wheelock Pension Plan: read the late developments in your paper, hear your radio thunder its pros and cons, see its personalities on your neighborhood picture screens!

"I am in favor of the Wheelock Plan because it will put men back to work—"

"America has a rich abundance for all. The Wheelock Pensions will bring each citizen his share of it."

One out of three lapels wore a button of some sort, each town had its partisan societies, there were mass meetings, parades, and every fence that bore a primary poster had one of the Wheelock slogans beside it.

There was a song that Harwood had hear ten thousand voices sing:

A home for every woman
A job for every man
If you vote, vote, vote, vote
Vote the Wheelock Plan!

BUT behind all the scenery and staging Harwood could see the many-fingered-hand of Jonas G. Galway and his allies that guided the puppet strings. He realized how subtly they had dramatized, how exactly they had focused the spotlight of the nation's

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interest on the issue of governmental debt and spending.

The keynote of the coming presidential campaign had been sounded, the lines of the ballot-battle defined. The middle-of-the-path men, the safe-and-sane brigades, had found their standards and heard the rallying cry.

The disbursements of the Katy Belle had served the purpose old J. G. intended. They were highlights in the propaganda program that taught Mr. Average Citizen and his wife to be money-conscious.

They drew the sharp demarcation between honest, hard-working, thrifty providence and the frenzied finance that pulled magic rabbits from a silk topper. They created headlines for the throwaway pamphlets and the brochures that crammed the mails.

If the Government Gave You a Thousand Dollars Every Thursday—

So they started. The neat type pointed out what a fat slice of your income the taxes, direct and hidden, would gnaw away. Here were the sums that Theatre Projects and Civic Bird Baths and Federal Clam Seeding would cost you.

The charts explained how many hapless generations would come and go before the adult male population of Maine, Idaho, Kentucky or Nebraska could amortize the national debt if each paid a thousand weekly.

It's the same old proposition, Harwood thought. Every man would like to be a millionaire but not at the cost of creating a whole nation of fellow plutocrats. Who wants to be general of an army composed of generals?

A wise old codger, J. G. Galway, with all his bluster and bluumph. The Katy Belle was still producing for him, paying a new kind of dividend. He had turned a potential tax liability into a political asset, a maneuver that assured him a profit no matter what the courts might later decide.

Yes, chalk up another master stroke to the old pirate's blade. Smaller things than Katy Belle had turned the crazy tide of a popular election.

Harwood escaped from the whirlpool of debate to the calm of his compartment. He eyed the leather-bound portfolio on his berth and shrugged as he took it up.

In his hand he could feel a weight of fate and destiny that would never be written upon these pages. Here were the names and the facts, all precise, but what would the consequence be tomorrow and tomorrow?

John Page Pickering—he read the name, the dated list of checks that had been mailed, and below saw the neat red cross-mark which signified his first assignment was accomplished, ended, completed.

But what of the man himself? Had Katy Belle's bounty marked finis to the problems of J. P. Pickering, Virginia doctor? Had the golden rain smoothed out the declining path of his life or served instead to raise new obstacles across it?

Harwood shook his head. Something odd about this one. Why the delay in cashing the checks? Why did J. G. Galway insist he would attend to the doctor personally?

He thumbed the pages over: O'Leary, Holdcraft, Minnick—who would inherit the passport to happiness of poor Veronica Vine?—Stoner. . . .

Yes, this was the last. Karl Wilhelm and no more. The travel, the excitement—how long had it been since that wild night in J. G. Galway's throne room, and Susan there with her small grave smile? In another week

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Thomas Harwood would drop the magic wand that circumstance had put in his hand, and then—

And then what?

WHEN this outlandish business is done, he had thought, I can start being human again. The burden lifted, the sweet relief!

But staring now at the final page he sensed no satisfaction. He recalled the classroom fly trapped in a vacuum jar with no atmosphere to buoy its wings.

"Forget her, Harwood," he said aloud. "Don't be a blithering fool, you fool."

But what's the use of talking?

The porter had brought him a copy of the Portland *News-Record,* yesterday's issue, and he read the headlines idly. The paper was one of J. G. Galway's chain and the Wheelock Bill was prominent on page one.

The lead article predicted that the House would vote on the measure early next week. On page twelve Harwood found the Joel Lucas column, *Your Neighbors and Mine.*

The inset halftone showed an elderly gentleman, kindly and sedate. The article dealt with three estimable ladies of Floral Park who were doing their bit for civic betterment by a campaign to stamp out the inaccurate penny scales which apparently infested the town.

The writer demonstrated a style that combined the florid with the folksy, and borrowed rather heavily from Walter Winchell for some of his effects.

Joel Lucas would be slightly deaf in one ear, Harwood decided, and anxious to know whether New York was as fast a town as World's Fair visitors claimed it was.

Susan, Susan. . . . The *click-clack* of wheels and the steadily humming rails.

. . . Among those espied at the polo matches were Mrs. Renssalaer (Fifi) Lorgnette, Sir Reginal Tiffin, Bart., and Miss Susan Galway in Lilly Daché's newest chapeau.

. . . From left to right at the Hunts Club Ball: Susan Galway, Miss Suzanne Galway, Mrs. Thomas Susan and the former Harway Galwood of Biarritz, Coney Island, Park Avenue and Grand Concourse, Bronx. . . .

The rain tapped doggedly on the windows. No matter how fast the train might run it could not outrace that soft gray persistence.

CHAPTER XVI

THE INQUIRING REPORTER

A TELEGRAM had arranged a meeting with Joel Lucas at Harwood's hotel. The phenomenon of a brightly beaming five o'clock sun (the Oregon traveler had begun to believe he would never see that gay golden orb again) somewhat tempered the surprise with which Harwood viewed the newsman.

"I've heard that you fellows out here have everything the human heart can desire," Harwood said, "but I thought the Fountain of Youth was a Florida copyright. Or were you wearing your Christmas disguise when you had that photo taken?"

Lucas laughed. "You mean the column cut? That's strictly a gag. I'd been beefing about a picture to Tim Crofton—you know, just in fun—and Tim, he runs the city desk, slapped that Foxy Grandpa face in there to rib me. He claims it would ruin the column good will if they used my real picture now."

Harwood could understand the city editor's logic. The Joel Lucas of ac-

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tuality was thin and cadaverous with stringy mouse-brown hair, excessive teeth, a manner sly and knowing.

The rumpot newspaper men of fiction he said, refusing a highball, were a libel on the profession.

"We're too busy to carouse around," he continued, by way of embellishment. "You have to keep a clear head on your shoulders in this racket. Another thing, a lot of us write fiction and articles, magazine stuff, in our spare time. You can't knock out that sort of thing unless you've got one hundred percent concentration. Ever read *True Criminal Detective Magazine?*"

Harwood pleaded *non vult* and *nil nisi desperandum.*

"I had the lead article in last month's issue: 'The Strangler of Lovers' Lane,' a dramatization of a local murder case. You don't happen to know any of the *Dispatch* crowd back in New York, do you Mr. Harwood? Man who used to work in our shop has a fine job with them, I hear."

"About this Karl Wilhelm matter," Harwood began.

"I've often thought that I might take a shot at the big town myself some day," Lucas said. "Are you on the legal staff of the papers or on the business side or what?"

"I represent a private corporation. I'm anxious to get in touch with Wilhelm—well, it's an inheritance."

Lucas grinned. "You don't have to be cagey with me, Mr. Harwood. I happen to know, see, that these Wilhelm instructions came straight from the New York office. I saw the letter to the managing editor about running the advertisement and posting the notice. Say, by the way, haven't I seen you or your picture somewhere?"

Harwood had managed to keep himself in the background of the Katy Belle publicity but even so he had submitted to sufficient interviews and cameras to make his name and features reasonably notable. He found the present lack of recognition mildly amusing and an impulse decided him to let revelation wait.

(This was the second blunder on the reproachful list he would later compile.)

"Maybe it was a couple of other fellows," the reporter said. "Anyway, you can see my point. If there's something doing on this Wilhelm I ought to get the credit. You'd still be up a blind alley if it wasn't for me.

"I was digging through some old courthouse records for a Sunday feature, human interest stuff, when I stumbled on this clue. I've been spending most of my time for the past two weeks bringing it up to date and checking things. I really put in the work on this."

"Naturally we'll want to pay you for your time," Harwood said dryly. "I only hope you've got the right man. My office telephoned you, I believe—"

"No, no, there's no mistake. I've got all the dope on him. Big gray-haired man around fifty-five, I'd say. Born in Texas; an ironworker. This is the one, all right. I guess your office got a little sore when I wouldn't tell 'em all I knew. Tim Crofton tried to pump me too.

"But I don't have to tell you, Mr. Harwood, that information is a newspaper man's stock in trade. You've got to protect your own interests in a thing like this."

"The first law of nature," Harwood agreed. "Are you ready to go? I assure you the recompense will be ample if you've found the man we want."

"Now don't get me wrong," Lucas said quickly. "I'm not trying to hold you up or anything like that. As soon

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as I found out you were connected with the New York office though, I thought that maybe—well, what chance has a guy with ideas in this town? I've had enough experience to handle the big stuff, but do I ever get a chance? I write something decent and the desk hacks it into hamburger. Too literary, they're always crabbing. Just because they don't like a man is that any reason to murder good copy?"

Harwood made a sympathetic sound and nodded. "I know, I know, I know. Jealousy, office politics—yes, I can see how tough that would be. Does Wilhelm live nearby? Could we reach him now?"

"I can put my finger on him in twenty minutes," the reporter assured. "Would you mind if I grabbed a bite before we go, though? My old jalop' is parked outside and I can run you right over.

"I was just thinking: there wouldn't be a Bergdoll angle on old Wilhelm, would there? You fellows back East gave that draft-dodger business quite a play a while ago. That's an interesting slant, isn't it? I'll check on that."

"We'll stop at the restaurant downstairs." Harwood said. "Will I need a raincoat?"

"The weather report says clear and warmer. You got any idea, Mr. Harwood, how much a first-class reporter makes in New York? I've heard they pay as high as two hundred."

JOEL LUCAS ordered abundantly and ate leisurely. Men who bolted their lunches in fifteen minutes or satisfied themselves with a free-lunch snack were digging their own graves, he pointed out. It was a wonder to him how ninety percent of his fellow craftsmen escaped chronic dyspepsia or ulcers of the stomach.

"I believe in doing things thoroughly," he said. "The way I handled this Wilhelm business will show you what I mean. I was looking through these old records, as I said, that went 'way back to the war days. We had our spy scares out here too, and there was a shipyard fire that looked like sabotage. That's where I spotted the name. Wilhelm had just come to town apparently, and was picked up on suspicion."

He chuckled. "I guess the old boy was pretty sore. They held him about three months, it seems, and he brought suit for false arrest. I've got copies of the trial minutes down at the office. He took the stand and told them what a good American he was. He proved that he tried to enlist four different times and waved ten thousand dollars' worth of Liberty Bonds at 'em. He didn't win his case, though."

"I understand that a number of fine citizens were caught in the same sort of jam," Harwood said. "War's a nasty business."

"But listen to this," said the reporter. "Here's where I had to use my head. All right, you have Karl Wilhelm here in town in 1917. Where does that get you? You could check directories and lists and civic records until you went blind without finding the name again. There he was and there he ended. Maybe you found that out for yourself, eh?"

"We knew that he came to this section of the country," Harwood agreed, "but our canvass showed little beyond that."

"And here's why," Lucas chuckled. "All I had to go on was his statement at the trial. He said he was in the iron trade and also a glass worker. I took a fresh start from there and two days later—wait, I believe I've got the photostat. Yeah, here, take a look."

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FROM a thick envelope he fished out a paper and handed it across. Harwood unfolded the incorporation statement of the Eagle Glass Company.

"An editor will never have to howl at me for documentation," Lucas said. "When I cover a story I cover it all the way. See there: Carl Williams, president. That's how our man disappeared. He changed his German name, that's all, and I've got the signatures down at the office that you can compare and prove it."

"Neat work," Harwood commended. "Did the new name make him a solid, respected citizen? Is he a wealthy man?"

"I've got the whole story," said the reporter eagerly. "It's a novel, a plot for a book. Simple, down-to-earth, like Steinbeck's stuff. This clipping, for instance—here, look at this."

"It's a death list," Harwood, frowning. "I thought you told me—"

"No, that's his son. Carl Williams, age five. He died in the big influenza epidemic, remember? You could work in a swell description of that. How the mother felt, the father cursing the exhausted doctors, real sob stuff right from the heart."

Harwood lifted his eyes, lowered them quickly.

"Now here's a picture that was published in the old *Express*. That's the glass factory, and there he is with his partners in front of it. Williams is the big fellow."

The yellowed paper showed him to be a tall man, husky, with a wide confident smile. He was dressed in the stiff style of the day, a watch chain draping his vest and a pin in the flaring cravat that puffed from beneath his wing collar. Harwood could see the strength and the pride in him, the genial self-assurance.

Lucas pointed. "This is the hood of a car. It's a Stanley Steamer, hot stuff back then. They probably used to holler, 'Hold your horses, boys, here comes Carl Williams in his fool contraption!' "

"Looks like a nice little factory," Harwood said. "More coffee?"

"No, no thanks. I hope I've got that other picture here. It would make a great novel, Mr. Harwood. I could use that Dos Passos technique, the kaleidoscope. Or I could do it as a play. . . . Oh yes, this is it."

The snapshot was clear and sharp. The same smiling man sat on a rise of steps with a shirtsleeved arm across a woman's shoulders. She was blonde, plump, jolly, and her shy upward look would be modernly classified as comic adoration. To Harwood's eye however, it was natural and real and sincere. The woman loved him, Karl Wilhelm or Carl Williams.

"All the men wore pompadour haircuts then," Lucas explained. "That was his house on what used to be Carver Avenue. I could take you over there right now."

"Whenever you're ready," said Harwood.

"No, but here's what I mean," the reporter said eagerly. "Listen, Mr. Harwood, it won't take us an hour. I'd just like to show you the story I see in this. It would be a knockout of a movie, a wonderful play. Can you spare just a few extra minutes?"

Harwood shrugged. The eager efficiency of Joel Lucas was beginning to wear upon him and he was tempted to explain that his newspaper influence was nil, and his sole acquaintance in the trade a rod-and-gun writer he had encountered at cocktails, name and affiliation now forgotten.

At the same time—well, it looked

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bright and pleasant outside and there was plenty of daylight remaining.

"If you insist," he said, "why not? This is really your party, you know, and what's an extra hour among friends?"

(This was number three, his third mistake, the one to be remembered most bitterly after.)

JOEL LUCAS braked his roadster and pointed. "There she is. Would you recognize it from the picture?"

The surrounding lot was weed-grown and scattered with rubbish. The roof gaped, the front of the building sagged, there was not an unbroken pane in any window.

"But that sign says 'Laundry,'" Harwood demurred.

"I guess it's housed a lot of propositions since the Eagle Glass went belly-up. Say, that's a story too! Take a building, see, and tell about the people that worked in it, some of them failing and some moving on to success. The old handyman or caretaker could be your continuing character—"

"Let's stick to Carl Williams. What happened to him?"

"Did you know they had a depression back in twenty-one? I didn't, either until I dug into this. The old Eagle must have had her tail pinched in it, for the other partners withdrew and Williams worried along on his own until twenty-three. They forced him into bankruptcy then."

"Where do people get the desire to destroy things that are old and deserted?" Harwood said as the car turned. "Remember how you'd shy stones at the vacant buildings when you were a kid? I still have the same impulse now if I see a pane of glass in some lonely ramshackle place, and—it makes you ashamed of yourself."

The car bumped forward. A spray of moisture speckled the windshield.

"Just a drizzle," the reporter said. "It'll blow over. Those big trucks ruin the streets here. That building that covers the next block is the factory where Williams went to work later. Quite a comedown, huh, from running your own shop to holding mould at forty or fifty cents an hour?"

"Yes," Harwood said, "I can imagine."

(He remembered the man who had come to work for Gambrill and Hutchins, the neat gray man. This Mr. Ludlow, somebody said, had been in Gambrill's college class. Used to have his own big practice with twenty juniors and assistants. He worked mechanically, lunched alone, couldn't seem to keep his mind on his job. After two weeks he disappeared.)

"Even the big shops run into tough sledding," Lucas said. "They're only working one shift a day now back there. Half the force has been laid off for a couple of years.

"I had a pip of a column on that one day last month. I came down early in the morning when they were lined up at the gate. There must have been more than a hundred looking for a substitute job that day.

"I just touched on the lighter side, of course: the jokes they told and the way they kidded each other."

"Ummmmmm," said Harwood.

THE car turned into a pleasant street of lawns and shrubbery and straight proud trees. Children watched them from white porches. The reporter pointed.

"That's the one. There's the steps where that picture was taken. If Williams had been a smart business man he'd have held the title in his wife's

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name and saved something out of the wreck. They say though, that he actually insisted on selling the house and his car and some patents he owned and applying the proceeds to the factory debts.

"Can you imagine that? The stubborn, thick-headed Kaiser Wilhelm streak coming out in him, I suppose. He kept paying a little here and a little there until 1926 when the last claim was satisfied."

"A hundred cents on the dollar," Harwood said. "Stubborn, proud—yes, you could see that in his chin."

"In the play, of course, I'd change the character," Lucas pointed out. "I'd make him more realistic, more like the average man."

The house was square and comfortable, built for permanence and a family hearth. Man's home, man's castle, the solid rock upon which the solid lives are built. The two who had turned their backs upon it, the tall man and the adoring woman, left more than skeleton walls and roof behind, Thomas Harwood thought.

"Just the one child?" he asked.

"The boy that died, that's all. I talked to a woman who remembered them and she said Mrs. Williams got thin as a rail within a year. She didn't look like the sickly type in that picture, did she?"

Harwood had a feeling that dampness was crawling down his collar. "This is all very interesting," he said, "but I'll skip the rest if you don't mind. Your little drizzle is blowing over all right, but only to make room for a real rain if I'm any judge. Where does Wilhelm—Williams, that is—where is he living now?"

"But it's the contrast," Lucas protested. "It's the steady march of things that will give you the real kick. Like mile-stones along the road almost. Honest, it won't take ten minutes. And we've got to pass these places anyway."

"I never could understand"—Harwood rubbed his cheek—"why writers wanted to write about human misery. Like those Russian stories, I mean, or this young crowd—what do you call 'em?—proletarian? If I see a dog that's been run over or a grotesque cripple with a swollen head I turn away as quickly as I can."

"You wouldn't make a good reporter, Mr. Harwood."

"I suppose not. I suppose it's true, too, that you can't eliminate ignorance, starvation, social injustice by ignoring their existence.

"Funny though, isn't it? Here's one man who devotes himself to the high romance of debutantes and duchesses to thrill the downtrodden masses. In the next booth sits a fellow writer who details the squalor and depravity of the lower depths.

"One is a literary figure, the other a hack, yet both make a comfortable living."

"Writing is a funny business," the reporter said. "You ought to see the way those buzzards on the desk manhandle my stuff. I was going to show you the little place near the railroad tracks where the Williamses moved, but they only lived there a year or so. He must have been working pretty steady in the factory then and putting his pennies in the bank. They bought the store in 1927."

CHAPTER XVII

TWO FOR THE MONEY

THE drizzle had become a light rain now and a wind ran down the street in limping gusts. They had

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reached a neighborhood business section, two rows of unpretentious glass fronts that stared at each other with yellow eyes across the murk.

"If we had more time," Lucas said, "I'd show you the rooms above where they lived. Did I tell you the old guy could draw? There's little colored pictures he made—rabbits and ducks and windmills—still on the wall up there."

"This place is still going at any rate," Harwood said. "Don't tell me that—"

"Oh sure. See the sign; it's a chain store now. They say he did a nice business too for a few years. The only thing was, he let his customers run their bills too high. If he collected the money they owed him he'd have been all right. You can imagine what the crash did to the poor old guy."

"But a man like that—" Harwood made a quick, futile gesture. "Why should a man like that try to run a store? He was a worker, a craftsman, a big strong fellow who did things with his hands."

"It was his back," the reporter explained. "I was going to tell you that. He got his back burned at the factory and his skin—I don't know—it wouldn't heal. He was in the hospital quite a while, drawing compensation pay. They made him a settlement and he put that with what he had to set up the store business."

"Where is he?" Harwood said sharply.

"He got well all right," Lucas said. "His back would stay healed as long as he didn't try heavy work. From what they tell me the people liked him around here. He could have made a go of the store, overdue bills and all, if his bank hadn't failed. That's what put him under."

Harwood cursed. "Where is he? Find him, you fool!" Anger thickened his voice and self-disgust put a bitterness on his tongue. Two hours of talk and pseudo-drama and stupid theories! Two hours of a new life stolen from Karl Wilhelm who had known two many ugly hours.

"I'm sorry, Lucas," he said quickly. "It's my own fault. The point is"—he tapped his briefcase— "I have the medicine here to put Carl Williams back in business. Here's the stuff that will heal those burns of his. Did you ever hear of the Kaybee Corporation, Lucas? Ever read about those checks for a thousand dollars every Thursday?"

The reporter's lips curled away from jutting teeth. "My gosh!" he gasped. "I knew I'd heard your name. . . . Harwood—old Carl Williams!"

"We've wasted enough time," said Harwood. "Let's get going."

The reporter stared. "My story—the pictures," he said thickly. "Everything right in my lap. . . . Now listen, Mr. Harwood, please. You got to give me my chance. I got to have an exclusive—one edition. It's my whole career."

"I won't notify any of the papers"—Harwood glanced a his watch—"until nine o'clock. You'll have them all lashed to the mast. Come on, put this thing in gear."

"Look—but listen, please. I just want to call Tim Crofton. Let me speak to him just for two minutes. They might make up an extra."

"You listen to me, Lucas," Harwood said. "I've already let you waste too many minutes. You and your stupid novels and your jobs in New York—damn it, man, aren't you human? I'm warning you right now—just try to get out of this car before you bring me to Wilhelm."

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"There's no need to get tough," Lucas said, starting the car with a jerk. "What's a few extra minutes?"

"All right, I'm sorry. This rain—I suppose I'm just tired. How far away does he live? You can call your paper when we get there."

THE reporter drove six blocks in silence. "Now look, Mr. Harwood," he pleaded, "I only want to set you right. This is the chance I've been looking for all my life. A thing like this can give a man a national reputation overnight. Why couldn't you wait until morning to notify the other sheets? After all the work I've done on this can't you give me that one little break?"

"My instructions." Briefly Harwood shrugged. "The news is bound to leak out. Neighbors, all that sort of thing."

"Leave that to me. I'll handle that. Don't you see, Mr. Harwood, this is perfect. It's the climax I needed for the whole story, the knockout punch. They'll have to give me a by-line. I'll be on the news pages for days. I'll tell that butcher-bunch if they change a single comma in the copy I'll take the story to the *Oregonian,* by heaven!"

"How much farther?" Harwood asked.

"It isn't far. He's working down on Division Street, janitor in one of those old apartments. I saw him just the other day, puttering around the porch. He looked fine. I wish you'd let me stop at one of these houses so I could have 'em send a camera over."

"You've got lots of time for that. What happened after he lost his store?"

"It was pretty tough, I guess. Odd jobs, anything he could find. He kept trying to get back at the glass factory but they couldn't use him on account of his back. I guess they figured they'd paid enough hospital bills for him."

"I see. Yes."

"They had a lot of trouble with him down at the Relief Bureau. A fellow there told me the old guy was a little soft in the head. A neighbor reported the case, see, and an investigator came around. Old Carl told her he didn't want charity, he wanted work. They'd send him food and stuff and he'd cart it back. Sometimes his wife would come down and get it, though."

Harwood drummed his knuckles on the briefcase and cursed the downpour. The sensation he had was of small ghostly hands that pawed clammily beneath his clothes.

"Another thing, they couldn't stop him from taking this part-time work he'd manage to find. When he'd do that, of course, it would automatically remove him from the relief rolls.

"This janitor's job they got him isn't much but it's a roof over their heads and enough to eat on. . . .

"Did that last sign say Comstock Street? Yeah, I thought so. We take a left at the next corner."

The dwellings they passed were shabbily similar, grim and forlorn in the dusk and pelting rain. The sullen lights in the windows had no warmth, no cheer. Men might use these shelters for a night's rest, a transient month, but they would seek on to kindlier cliffs for the family cave, the homeplace. These bleak panes would always be a frame for new faces.

"Here—no, wait! I guess it's the next one. The number is 174." The car bucked and jerked along the curb. "Yep, here we are."

HARWOOD, his collar upturned and briefcase clamped under his arm, opened the door and made a dash

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for the protection of the high stoop. He heard the reporter shout after him.

Lucas gestured from the sidewalk. "Basement, down here," he called. A gust of rain buffeted Harwood's face as he descended and he could hear the distant clangor of an inner bell. The reporter rattled the knob of the door.

"They're in there all right," he said. "You can see the light down yonder."

He thumbed the janitor's signal again, and through the grimed door-pane they saw the flashlight beam that came towards them along the corridor. A voice grumbled at the stubborn bolt until it yielded. The door was opened grudgingly.

"What you fellows want?"

"Say, you aren't Williams. Come on, Mr. Harwood, come in out of the rain. We want to see Carl Williams, the janitor."

"I'm janitor here. What you want?"

"Why don't you switch on the lights, Olson?" The question came crisply from the rear gloom. "The control's right here."

A dim overhead bulb glowed. They faced a hulking fellow in overalls who gripped his flashlight like a truncheon and eyed them narrowly. Down the hall came a brisk little man.

"Did I hear you ask for Williams?" he called. "I'm Mr. Bolling, the owner." He sniggered. "What can we do you for?"

"I want to see Carl Williams on a personal matter," Harwood explained. "I was told—I understand he works here."

"Works!" Mr. Bolling made the word an unholy exclamation. "You should see my roof! You should inpect the condition the top floor plaster is in! How many times do I have to tell a man something to make it understood I want it done?"

"Isn't Williams in now?" asked Lucas. "Is his wife back there? Do you know where he is?"

"Are you fellows from the Home Relief?" Mr. Bolling countered. "Well, I don't care. You can't unload your cripples on me. Making repairs is part of a janitor's job, and mumbling about a sore back has never stopped a leak yet that I know of.

"Don't ask me where he is, mister, I sent him packing yesterday and good riddance, I'll say. Had the nerve to stand there and tell me to mind my tongue when I talked to his wife. Shake his fist in *my* face, would he?"

Harwood found that his own fists had clenched. He made a swift forward step and the hulking Olsen drew back defensively against the wall.

"Why—why, what's wrong, gentlemen?" Mr. Bolling faltered. "I intended to notify your office, of course."

"Where is he?" Harwood said harshly. "I—damn you, doesn't anybody know?"

Olsen licked his upper lip, his flashlight held in readiness. "Old Man Fogarty took 'im in," he said after a pause. "It ain't my fault I take his job. I help to carry his bed and pictures. Fogarty gave dem a room. Two blocks down, number 12 the house."

"I paid him in full," Mr. Bolling called shrilly after them. "Six dollars covers to the end of the week. Nobody can say I don't treat my help fair and square."

"Hey, the car!" Joel Lucas cried in the street. "No use getting soaked."

HARWOOD lowered his head against a rain squall and strode swiftly on. This final delay was culmination of all the stupid restraints he had allowed since five o'clock. It must be eight or after now.

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This miserable weather had combined with the reporter's garrulous discourses to put him in a fine state of nerves. A sharp impatience hurried him along.

"Say," said Lucas at his shoulder, "it was certainly lucky about that Swede. I could have found him myself, of course—"

"That scrawny-necked old buzzard!" Harwood muttered. "Sore back never stopped a leak, eh? Is this the block?"

"End of the street," Lucas panted. "This is the even-number side. I wonder if Fogarty's got a phone?"

Here were the same bleak windows, the same rickety steps and slattern porches. Except for a few bedraggled cars the street was scoured bare. Faint light came from some of the doorways but in the murk no house number was visible. Harwood mounted on speculation and was able to discern a paint-scrawled 14.

"Next door," he called. "Let me do the talking."

His clothes were sodden. A miniature cascade spilled from his hat as he bent to peer at the names in the vestibule of the house adjoining. There were six battered mail receptacles and the scrawls and obliterations that climbed the wall above them were a sorry roster, a despondent plot for another of the novels that Joel Lucas might some day put on paper.

"I couldn't find any Williams there," the reporter said. "I pushed Fogarty's buzzer but he doesn't answer."

The door gave inward to Harwood's thrust and he entered a mean and narrow hallway with a bare staircase leading dimly above. A crack of light gleamed beneath a door at corridor's end and he weaved between baby carriages and refuse cans to tap briskly.

A bald, truculent man, his grizzled mustache clamped over a pipe, answered the second summons.

"Williams. Never heard of 'im."

Harwood said, "They moved here yesterday, I understand. An elderly couple."

"It's thim two on the third floor, Andy," a woman called. She hove into the background. "The rear rooms wasn't rented anyway, Fogarty said, and they might as well be usin' one of 'em. Third floor, mister, right up those stairs. There's nobody else up there."

HARWOOD climbed impatiently behind Joel Lucas. He was breathing shallowly, and though he could hear the remarks the reporter made he found the words vaguely meaningless.

The anticipation of what he would do was growing in him. He was forming the phrases he would say, visualizing the transformation in those two who had known so much misfortune.

Karl Wilhelm, now Williams. Anna, his wife.

The rich blue checks upon the table. . . .

"Landing light burned out up there, I guess," said Lucas, pausing. "Wait till I find my matches."

They followed the feeble torch in his hand to the third floor, dark and silent. There was a mustiness here and the damp had an added chill. The match flame died and Harwood halted, flexing muscles against the ache in his shoulders.

In the hazy luminance from below he saw the shape of the place indistinctly. A board creaked as he shifted his weight.

"Dropped 'em, dammit," Lucas muttered. "You think they're already in bed?"

"I—I don't know." Harwood's voice was an instinctive whisper that

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matched the reporter's tone. Lucas struck a match that flared briefly and was mysteriously puffed out. He was fumbling for another when Harwood grabbed his hand.

"Wait." The word was a tense command. "Hold it! I thought I—there, can you smell it now?"

"I can't smell—" The reporter made a whimpering sound. He cried out shrilly, "It's gas—gas! *OhmyGodit's-gas!"*

The white placard on a door, dimly observed in the last flicker of flame, guided Harwood's rush. He yanked at the knob, lunged his shoulder into a panel that bounced him back. Joel Lucas was screaming at him, rousing the house with his frenzied yelps, but by now Harwood had deciphered the words at the top of the placard, printed bold.

"Danger," they read. "Keep out."

"Wilhelm," he roared. "Carl Williams!" He hammered the panel with pounding fists. He jerked and wrenched the knob, shouting.

His shoulder rammed again and thin boards cracked. A stinging moisture filled his eyes and he coughed. With his hands braced on the staircase railing he thrust his heel against the lock and kicked in fury. Metal snapped. The door sagged, then lurched suddenly inward.

"No!" they were shouting from the stairway. "Don't!"

The paper that had stuffed the interstices fell fluttering. The fumes were a vast, blinding exhalation that made him shield his face in his arms.

He was pawing for a handkerchief to muffle his mouth when the hands gripped him. They tried to drag him away.

"You'll blow up the whole damn house, you fool!"

"Bring him down! The alarm's turned in, the emergency truck's on the way."

"Hold him, Andy! Somebody grab his legs there!"

HE FOUGHT against them but there was a dizziness in his stomach that was floating up to his brain. They forced him down the stairs past a raincoated policeman bellowing commands. He was in the lower hallway—his knees had developed a sag by then—when he heard the first siren's caterwaul.

"Respirators," he gasped. "Ambulance. Tell 'em—spare no—expense."

"You'll be all right," said somebody. "You didn't get it bad."

They thrust him into the rain-clean night. Hands helped him down the steps. He was foggily aware of faces, voices, the gleam of headlights and a swelling crowd.

He sat on the running board of a car, all strength drained out of him. When he tried to reply to their questions the answers burned in his throat.

Sirens, clangor, swift orders hacking at the confusion. . . .

A policeman and a man in white let him out of the rain. They assisted him to an ambulance where he drank the bubbling white emetic. The swift sickness left him weak but clear-headed. He didn't want to lie down, he told them.

"He just got a whiff of it," the interne said. "Let him walk around."

Harwood found it hard to breathe. "The Wilhelms," he panted. "Are they—?"

"The emergency gang is working on them now," said the policeman. "Made the run here in four minutes flat. That's speed, brother, I'm telling you. . . . Say, there's Matt Waldron

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now. How's it goin' there, Matt?"

"On a night like this!" the new voice complained.

"Pretty bad?"

"It was seein' 'em that way," Matt explained. "I turned the flashlight into the room and the only sticks of furniture they had was the two pictures on the wall and the two chairs. He sat in one with a blanket around him and she was pulled up facin' him. Just sittin' there, mind you, and the windows stuffed with papers and the burners in the stove turned on full blast."

"Any chance for 'em?"

"They're still workin'. It's the old story, though, like the big fellow up there says. 'Fifteen minutes,' he says. 'Why do they always call us in fifteen minutes too late?' "

CHAPTER XVIII

BIG CHIEF RUNAROUND

THOMAS HARWOOD said doggedly, "I don't give a damn what time it is and I don't say *Miss* Galway. It's him I want. Put J. G. Galway on the phone. Harwood's my name; you want me to spell it again? Thomas Harwood, tell him. He knows who I am. . . .

"I just want to tell him," he said, "about a man I killed. An old man, Karl Wilhelm, and a woman. I just want to cheer him up and make him feel as good as I feel. I've finished the job he gave me and maybe he'll want to celebrate. Put him on. . . .

"All right, hang up! Go ahead and disconnect! . . .

"Mr. Platt? I didn't ask for you, Mr. Platt. Is the old buzzard afraid to talk? Who's drunk and what if I am? Who's got a better right to be? I let that damned reporter talk and talk and talk. . . .

"Asleep? What do I care if he's asleep? Wake him up and I'll sing him a bedtime fairy tale. I'll tell him how hard they worked to wake up poor Karl Wilhelm. I'll read him the note Karl Wilhelm's wife left on the door."

(He would not soon forget that brave little pitiful note nor the sad courage hiding behind its fear. Under the warning capitals she had written:

Do not come in. Please notify the police. I have done this because he is too tired and sick to keep on and he worries so. He is a good man and not to blame. I put the medicine in his tea and waited until he was asleep so he would not know. It is not his fault. I, Mrs. Carl Williams, alone am to blame. The money on the shelf is for the trouble I caused."

On the shelf the three crumpled bills, the silver and the coppers. . . .)

"I'll put this call on my expense account, Mr. Platt," he said. "Tell him he can charge it off on his income tax and save another dollar. Tell him I'm sorry this poor fool Wilhelm had to die and spoil the nice publicity. Ask him how he wants the story handled in his papers. . . . Hello, hello—

"Oh. . . .

"I told them I didn't want to talk to you," he said. "Go on back to bed. I only wanted to tell your uncle that his Katy Belle business was finished, washed up. I'm through. I've resigned. . . .

"No, I won't listen. You listen to me. I was going to write you a letter, Miss Galway, but I'd just as soon tell you now. I love you, do you hear that? I've loved you since that first night and I always will.

"I just wanted to say it, that's all, before I say goodbye. I'll find a job somewhere and some hick-town girl that's more my speed. We'll see you on your uncle's yacht in the Sunday papers. . . .

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"Sure, sure, I know I'm a fool. That's all I've got to say. I won't keep you up. You can tell your uncle for me, though—"

Thomas Harwood stiffened in his hotel chair. His fingers tightened on the receiver and his free fist thumped the desk.

"Who's cursing your grandniece?" he shouted. "I wouldn't be rousing your household if you weren't too high and mighty to answer the phone yourself. All right, all right; I'll pipe down just as soon as you stop bellowing at me.

"I never said it was your fault that anybody died," he continued in diminished tone, "and I'm not an hysterical schoolgirl. I merely thought you'd be happy to know your little job was done. Your tax liabilities have been diverted and Gambrill can fight it out in the courts from here. . . .

"Pickering? I sent him the checks, didn't I? He's your old pal that you said you wanted to handle. . . .

"Go ahead! It's easy to call a man names when you're safe at the other end of the continent, or if you're a bony old skeleton with your billions and your bodyguards to hide behind. Go on and bluster! I only wish I could have ten minutes, just ten minutes face to face! . . .

"Who's a quitter? Who's yellow? Who's afraid? I'll meet you any place you say and tell you to your teeth! I'll be in your office—

"Washington, eh? What's the matter—aren't your trained seals in Congress barking the right tune? All right, Washington suits me fine. I'll pay the plane fare out of my own pocket and consider it a pleasure.

"Washington, Wednesday, the Galway Trust—okay. . . . And good night to you, you spavined old windbag!"

WASHINGTON is the wedding of Philadelphia (Pa.) and Savannah (Ga.), the millennial Mecca where the busy East meets the breezy West ("Howdy, folks!") and Northern reserve joins hands with the crinoline South in cavort around the pork barrel.

All out, all out for Washington nigh the Potomac, the eight-and-a-halfth wonder of the world! See the legislators and lobbyists, the monuments and the miracle men, the ambassadors and attachés and alphabetical analysts with a passion for anonymity.

Hear ye, hear ye, all kinds of speeches! Watch your favorite congressman bathe in his favorite horse-trough, order a brand new post office to match your coat and vest, and don't fail to bring the little woman back home a nice fresh project for a souvenir.

Washington, all out! The next stop is Newark Airport.

Thomas Harwood, in a gray suit as sober as his mien, presented himself as appointed at the granite façade of the Galway Trust Building, the fool for acknowledgment come.

He had been wrong and he would admit it. He would apologize and go.

After the first stunning impact of that other night had been survived, in the morning when his brain could think again, he saw the truth and weighed the balanced judgment. An hysterical schoolgirl—J. G. Galway had touched the raw spot there, but he was right.

Thomas Harwood, the culprit now freely confessed, had been trying to unload some share of his condemnation to other shoulders. He had sought to absolve his guilt by shouting it from the roofs.

The affair of Karl Wilhelm was a business assignment from J. G. Galway, nothing more. The tragic con-

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sequence was never of Galway's design and no slightest responsibility for it could possibly attach to him. He had merely furnished the riches, the ease and security of the background mirage which lighted each detail in horrible contrast.

No fault of Galway's, no. It had happened, that was all. It was the fall of the cards, the shape of things; call it Fate and let it go.

Each day men die by the many thousands in a thousand patternless ways. Suppose you board a bus, for example. You stand near the driver and lean down to ask him directions, where to change for such-and-such a street. There is a bump in the road, a jounce, and you lurch against him. At the same instant a child darts into the street.

Is it your fault that the driver can't reach the brakes in time or twist his wheel? Is it the fault of the paver who stopped to repair another roadway hump?

Certainly not. And yet—

He had concocted a hundred suppositious cases but the end of all his logic was that same dilemma: and yet! If he had grabbed a plane to Portland as he first intended. If he had halted that dumb reporter's monologue.

If-if-if! But self-reproach was no excuse for losing his head that night and saying what he said to J. G. Galway. It could not condone the stupidities he had blurted out to Susan. Thomas Harwood drew a long breath, his wry mouth already tasting the bitter medicine he must swallow.

BY CONSULTING a pair of uniformed guards, a mortgage expert, and a languid blonde he was ushered anticlimactically to an office officered by Lionel Platt.

"Harcourt, did you say? Can't somebody else see him? Is he a delegate, a congressman, or what? I really . . . Oooh! So it's you, eh? That was a fine way to talk, wasn't it, to a man you hardly know?"

"Sorry," Harwood said. "I—my appointment was with Mr. Galway. Will I be able to see him soon? I'd planned to catch the noon plane west if I could."

"I don't blame you," said Lionel. "They told me it was hot here but I didn't believe it would be like this. Sweltering's the word for it. At the same time though, I must say I find the Capitol exciting. Stimulating, you might say. J. G. almost floored me when he said that all political contacts would be in my hands while we were here, but so far everyone has been really charming. Have you read the morning paper? Is there any new convention news?"

"The Republicans meet in a few weeks to select a candidate," Harwood said gravely. "That's my knowledge on the subject, the sum total."

Lionel smiled. "Oh, we're not worried about that. It's what *he's* going to do that still has everybody guessing. He certainly won't back Hopkins, will he? What about LaGuardia? And suppose he breaks his word at the last moment and agrees to lead a compromise ticket himself?"

"I'll live," Harwood muttered. "How about Mr. Galway?"

"Oh, J. G.'s in a splendid mood these days. He's sure we have them on the run. He plans to be in the gallery himself tomorrow or next day when they vote on the Wheelock Bill. Did you know that in all his life this is only the second time he's been in Washington?"

"Damn it," Harwood exploded, "where is he? Where's Galway, you—you—"

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"Don't you threaten me!" cried Lionel. "Miss Helwig, Miss Waldo—I'll call the guards! I try to treat you pleasantly, like a civilized being, and you act like this. Just who do you think you are?"

"Will Galway see me or won't he?" Harwood demanded. "Can you answer a simple question? If he wants to see me, here I am. If he doesn't I'll be glad to go."

"I was about to inform you," Mr. Platt said stiffly, "that Mr. Galway motored into Virginia early this morning. He went to settle some Pickering matter, I believe. I was asked to acquaint you with this fact and to say that a car was available if you cared to follow.

"It's only a few hours' drive, I understand. Mr. Galway said you might like to get in on the finish of what you started. On the other hand, if you wanted to remain here until tomorrow—"

He drew back from the kilowatt content of Thomas Harwood's stare.

"The runaround, eh?" said the lawyer. "What's the idea? What's he cooking up now?"

"Do you want the car, Mr. Harwood, or don't you?"

"Damn his car and damn his scheming. I'll find him all right. I'll come running if that's what His Worshipful Eminence demands."

"The name of the town—"

"Thank you," said Harwood crisply. "As one fool to another, Mr. Platt, good morning!"

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

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Thundercloud Marsh

A gun blasted. A rain of shot pattered into the pile of ducks behind which Mike was crouching

Mike Gibson's home remedy for duck poachers: contraband, like decoys, can work both ways. And it's always the second way that counts

By JIM KJELGAARD
Author of "The Battle of Dabbit Run," "The Grass Grows Again," etc.

MIKE GIBSON, running his traps at night so that he might not reveal the locations of his sets, drew himself up in his boat and listened.

Far off in the marsh a light caliber pistol snapped. The crash of a heavier gun followed it. The light pistol snapped again, and there came five more shots from the heavy gun.

A high-pitched whine, starting at the edge of the great reed bed in Thundercloud Marsh and traveling swiftly toward shore, was borne to Mike.

It was a speed boat going in with another load of contraband ducks that the duck poachers were trapping on the marsh. The two shots from the light pistol had been fired by Billy Bartlett, the young warden who had been chasing the poachers for three weeks now. The heavy gun was the poachers' reply.

Mike sat still ten seconds. A drifting boat, with a wounded or dead man in it, would be hard to find on the marsh at night. But he had to try. It might—or might not—mean everything to Laura, Mike's daughter.

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Mike wasn't sure how she felt but Billy had been sparking her for six months now.

Mike dipped the oars and sent the boat leaping ahead. This was Friday. Laura, in her last year at normal school, would be home at midnight with Tip Grugan, whose truck rolled past Mike's house at that time every night. If Billy meant more than just friendship to her and she came home to find him dead—

Mike shuddered.

He stopped for his next trap, set on the edge of the great reed bed that made of the center of Thundercloud Marsh ten thousand acres of natural game preserve that no boat could penetrate.

He turned his flashlight on the location. The trap was gone. The rancid, powerful scent still clinging to the grass tussock on which the trap had been set told him that it had held a mink.

And, because the drag to which the trap had been attached was thrown high on the grass tussock instead of dragged into the water, he knew that the mink had been stolen and had not escaped.

Mike swore. But there was nothing he could do about it. He rowed on toward the place where he had heard the shooting.

After twenty minutes a stray breeze, wandering lonesomely through the reeds, again brought him the pungent, skunk-like odor of mink. Mike laid the oars along the seat. Leaning over the nose of the boat, pulling it along by grasping the reeds that grew ahead of it, he made a silent way over the marsh.

He came on two more boats, half hidden in the shadows. He waited in the shelter of some reeds as he made out the figure of a man in each.

A booming voice said, "It's about time you got here."

The reply came to Mike in a confused murmuring.

"I've put five hundred and sixty on your truck since Tuesday," the first voice said. "That's two hundred and twenty-four dollars cash."

Again the reply was muffled.

"All right," the first agreed. "I'll pick it up here tomorrow night. . . . Take it easy! There's nobody around here."

THE boats separated and each went its way. Mike watched them go. The odor of mink is almost as strong and even harder to erase than that of skunk. There were no other trappers on the marsh.

The mink he had smelled was in one of the boats; and it had to be the one that had been stolen from his trap. Which boat it was in he didn't know.

And he couldn't follow either boat to find out. Billy Bartlett, possibly dead or wounded, was somewhere on the marsh; and Billy came first.

Mike rowed on. The meeting he had witnessed, he knew, was between one of the duck poachers and whoever bought the ducks they trapped. In the shelter of the reeds where the boats had been Mike found a small raft riding high on barrels and camouflaged with reeds. It was the "postoffice" where the buyer of the ducks paid the poachers off.

By making no contacts with the poachers save in this way, the buyer kept aloof from all shore contacts that might cast suspicion on himself. Duck poaching was a highly profitable racket with the poachers selling ducks for forty cents a piece and bringing in from one to three hundred a night. The buyer passed them on to hotels and inns for a dollar each.

Mike played his flashlight over the raft and thrust his hand beneath the reeds on it, but found nothing. Leaving it, he went on toward the place where he had heard the shooting.

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Until half past eleven he searched without success. Laura would be in at twelve, and doubly worried if he wasn't there to meet her.

He headed back to the landing and shoved his boat in beside a sixteen-foot scow that was piled high with reeds. They belonged to a man named Bardik, who was living in one of the marsh shanties and had been cutting reeds for two months. He said he was weaving them into baskets and shipping the baskets to Chicago—though Mike had never seen him ship any.

Mike glanced at the big lodge to the left of his cottage as he walked up the path from the landing. He had been caretaker at the lodge until Maroff, who said he was an insurance man ordered by his doctor to live outside, had come back. Now Mike glanced in the other direction to the small cottage where Billy Bartlett was living.

The cottage was dark.

IT WAS five minutes past twelve when Mike heard Tip Grugan's truck roll to a stop. A glow of pleasure crept over him. Whatever else had happened he would see Laura soon; and that was what he lived for.

Another five minutes crept by: more than enough time for her to run from the road to the cottage. Mike picked up his heavy duck gun and stepped out of the light. Then the door opened and Laura stood framed in it.

Her hat was in her hand. Her tan coat was open, and clung loosely to her slender body. There was no suggestion of panic about her. But there was a dead misery, an expression in her eyes as if she had been struck a sharp blow that had not hurt her body but had crushed her soul.

Mike said, "What's up?"

She turned blank eyes to his. "It's Billy. He's been hurt. I went over to see if he was in and found him lying beside his door."

Mike said, "You get some water boilin', Lolly. I'll bring Billy in."

She didn't need to say any more. Her manner told Mike the answer to the question that had been troubling him since Laura had started going to dances with Billy Bartlett. She was in love with him. That, as far as Mike was concerned, settled everything. He had always known that when Laura fell in love she would give to it all there was to give.

Mike found Billy Bartlett lying at the foot of the steps leading to his kitchen. He must have come in right after Mike, and this was as far as he had been able to get after he beached his boat. Mike touched his shoulder. Billy stirred and said, *"Aa-ah!"*

Mike's fingers came away sticky with blood. He stooped, cradled Billy in his arms, and carried him back to his house.

Billy had been hit twice. Once in the thigh, around which he had tightened a handkerchief as tourniquet, and once high up in the left shoulder. Mike loosened the tourniquet. Blood bubbled out of the ragged hole in Billy's thigh, but color flowed back into his leg.

Mike turned to Laura. "He ain't goin' to die. But you can do this better'n me."

With absorbent cotton and warm water she wiped the clotted blood away from Billy's thigh and shoulder. She cleansed the wounds and bandaged them. Billy's pulse picked up a little. His heart became steadier.

"I'll get Doc Arthur in the mornin'," Mike said.

He sat on a high-backed chair, watching Laura bend over Billy's bed. He offered no help, knew that she neither wanted nor needed help. He wouldn't go for the doctor tonight because whoever

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had shot Billy might come here to finish the job.

And he wouldn't send her because if the poachers met her in the dark, and suspected that she was Billy Bartlett's girl—Mike wished he had known before how things stood between them.

Toward morning there was a knock at the door. Mike opened it. Maroff stood there.

"I saw the light and thought there must be trouble," Maroff said.

"Billy Bartlett's been shot," Mike said levelly.

"Who shot him?"

"The duck poachers."

Maroff shook his head. "Did he identify the one who shot him?"

"No."

"Too bad," Maroff clucked. "Let me know if I can help."

An hour and a half later Billy Bartlett stirred and opened his eyes. He smiled, and Mike saw life come back into Laura's eyes.

Mike nodded, satisfied. Billy was a good, clean youngster. Of course, he was inexperienced but doing the best job he knew how. In his three weeks on the marsh he had destroyed thirty duck traps. But Billy didn't know that the poachers had intended that he find every one of those traps.

There were decoys for more purposes than enticing ducks into shooting range.

AT EIGHT o'clock Mike walked to Cranston for Doc Arthur; rode back with him, and stood beside the bed while Doc examined Billy's wounds. Doc wriggled his gray goatee.

"You might have saved the fee," he said. "I can't do any more than's been done."

"He'll be all right?" Mike asked.

"He should be. I'll drop around tonight."

"Doc," Mike said slowly, "some things are all right—an' some are all wrong. You'll be doin' me a big favor if you say nothin' about this in Cranston."

Doc Arthur looked from Billy to Mike, and back again. "I didn't see a thing," he murmured, and went out.

Billy turned his head. "I—" he began.

"Don't talk," Mike cut in.

He skidded the high-backed chair across the floor and put it beside the bed.

"Your nurse will camp here, Billy. Make her sleep if you can."

Laura was looking at him. Mike blushed furiously. Her eyes were tender and gentle, and full of an immense gratification. It was the way she used to look when she was a kid, and Mike had carried home dolls from Cranston for her.

Billy's hand stole across the blanket. His fingers wound about hers.

"Mike," she said, "you're swell."

"Aw, go on. Look, Lolly, I got things to do. Don't worry about anything if you shouldn't see me around from time to time. Everything will be all right."

He left them alone and went to the shed in back of the house. He climbed the ladder leading to the loft, set aside a pile of decoys, and took two heavy seines from the corner.

One by one he went over each separate cord and knot in both seines. The seines were heavy, had been used by Mike to seine sturgeon. Every frayed or rotten cord Mike replaced with new. When the seines were finished to his satisfaction he lay down on them to rest.

Billy Bartlett and Laura were in love and that was perfectly all right with Mike. It made it easier when a man knew those things. But the duck poachers were still on the marsh. When Billy was able he would have another fling at them.

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They had tried to kill him once. The next time they might do it—if there was a next time. There wouldn't be if Mike could help it. Lolly wanted Billy alive.

It lacked an hour of dark when Mike left the shed. He sauntered along the edge of the marsh, jumped Pussy Cat Slough on the flat rocks laid across it, and threaded a shaky way over some quagmire that quaked under his feet. He came out near three willow trees growing so closely together that they looked like one tree, and he ducked beneath the branches.

A tiny shack was built in the small space inside the three trees and was completely hidden by them. Mike rapped on the plank door.

"Coo mawn in, Mike," a shrill voice invited him.

Mike stepped into the shack and face to face with One Eye Munger, the best hunter on the marsh and the best shot. As wary and high strung as a mink, the smallest thing was not too small for One Eye to notice.

As good a hunter by night as he was by day, One Eye made his rounds like the animals he hunted, sleeping when he was tired and eating when he was hungry.

"One Eye," Mike said, "would you fancy a dozen snelled hooks, hollow ground, barbed, and sharp?"

"Shoo."

"You want to hang in the brush around my place tonight?" Mike asked. "Lolly's there, and the warden's there. I want to make sure nobody comes that ain't got business there."

"Shoo," One Eye grunted. "I watch it."

With One Eye watching her Laura would be as safe as if a squad of soldiers was guarding her. As for himself: somebody had to be king pin on the marsh and he couldn't let Billy Bartlett get himself shot again. That's what Billy would do, too. He thought some decoys were real; but you couldn't blame him. He didn't know.

TEN minutes after the early autumn dusk folded Thundercloud Marsh under its black wing Mike stepped over the two seines in front of his boat and took his place at the oars. Buckled in a shoulder holster he had a .38 revolver, and in his right pocket twenty-five cartridges for it.

He rowed to the edge of the great reed bed and slackened his pace as he turned slowly around it. There came a tiny splash as a muskrat dived from a tussock into the water.

Mike rowed a hundred yards. There came the tinkling splash of another diving muskrat and he went on.

At two minutes of eight he marked with a white handkerchief the spot he had last stopped; then rowed to the raft he had found last night. He felt beneath the reeds on the raft and drew out a wallet wrapped in oilskin. He thrust it into his pocket and returned to the reed bed.

Twelve times more he stopped to hear muskrats dive, and each time went on. Finally he heard no muskrats. He let the oars hang in the rowlocks and listened hard. He rowed in close to the reed bed and sculled the boat along with one oar. With his free hand he reached out every five feet to tug at the reeds.

Finally, instead of remaining tight on the bottom, a long reed came away in his hand. You could destroy thirty duck traps on the marsh, or three hundred and thirty. And, if the poachers continued to take ducks, they weren't taking them on the marsh but inside the great reed bed.

Billy Bartlett might have figured that out for himself instead of letting him-

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self be convinced that he was getting every trap and being puzzled because the poachers were still taking ducks.

Bardik and his baskets had given Mike the clue. Mike had been all around the marsh, and hadn't seen the reed bed where Bardik was cutting his reeds. If he wasn't cutting them outside the great reed bed, he must be cutting them inside: making sloughs that a boat could ride to duck traps. And every marsh man knew that muskrats wouldn't stay in a lane that a boat was using every night.

Mike laid the reed in his boat. He pulled another to lay beside it and continued until, where the reeds had been shoved into the mud, he had pushed his boat its own length into them. Then he began to replace the reeds in back of the boat, locking himself in the reed bed.

After twenty minutes Mike came to the end of the loose reeds into a six-foot slough. He rowed down it, noting carefully every turn and every depth of water in it. Knowing such things might be handy when he came back this way.

He shoved his boat from the slough into open water, and began dodging among floating grass tussocks. Great numbers of ducks quacked sleepily and paddled out of reach as he rowed among them. Then, half hidden in the reeds, Mike found a duck trap.

It was built on the water, and was crowded with ducks that tried to fly away as he approached but were pulled down by the trap, made of ordinary net and supported on sticks.

Mike cut the net, reached in, grasped a fat mallard, wrung his neck, and cast him into the bottom of the boat. He got two more and killed them. He did not stop until there were fifty dead ducks in the boat.

Killing wild ducks like that gagged him. But it had to be.

When he had the ducks it held, Mike ripped the netting off the sticks and pulled the sticks out. When the poachers came it would be only another trap they could not find and would pass up until the next trip.

MIKE rowed back up the slough to the edge of the cut reeds, and with his knife hacked enough reeds from the side of the slough to run his boat into. He stuck a fringe of reeds back into the water between himself and the slough.

He could not be seen by anybody who did not make a special effort to look for him and the poachers would not. They thought themselves safe.

Mike lay down in the boat with his head on the pile of ducks. He tamped a corncob pipe full of tobacco, lighted it, and puffed soberly away. There was nothing to do now but wait. The poachers never made the rounds at the same hour each night. They might come within the next ten minutes, might not show up until near morning.

He waited an hour, then sat up and tapped his pipe out in the water. The reeds were rustling; the poachers were coming.

In ten minutes more the boat appeared, a long dark blot on the slough. There were four men in it, two of them rowing. Silently the boat glided down the slough into the center of the reed bed. Mike waited until it was out of sight, then shoved his boat out the slough back into the marsh.

Outside the reed bed, Mike tested the width of the camouflaged opening into it. It was about five feet, a little more than boat width. He tied the end of one seine to a tough bunch of reeds five feet to the left of the opening and ran the other end to another bunch of reeds five feet to the right. The second seine was similarly placed ten feet ahead.

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If the boat came out under power it might break the first seine, but that would slow it up so the second would stop it.

Mike withdrew his boat into the shelter of a thick patch of reeds and piled the ducks at the end facing the nets. Again he lay down with his head on the ducks. There was no hurry; the poachers had to look at their traps and come all the way out.

After a space Mike again heard the reeds shaking. He lay down on his stomach with only his eyes and forehead protruding over the pile of ducks. The .38 revolver swung in his right hand.

The poachers' boat came like a silently swimming animal into the moon-laden water. It paused a second while the man in the stern stuck the reeds back into the mud bottom so that the symmetry of the great reed bed was again unbroken. Mike heard a voice.

"Give 'er the gun."

The motor purred. The boat leaped forward. Mike followed it with the .38. Everything depended on the seines now. If they didn't hold, the boat would be out of range before his shooting could be effective.

The boat struck the first seine, churned there. A startled voice said, "What the—!"

Mike shot, the leaden "chunk" of his bullets seeming to leap back at him as they struck the boat below the water line. He shot again, and continued shooting until he had emptied the revolver.

Someone shouted.

A great wake of water foamed from the stern of the boat as the motor was opened wide. It ripped through the net. A gun blasted. A rain of shot patterned into the pile of ducks behind which Mike was crouching.

A pistol cracked. The slug whistled three inches over Mike's head.

The boat struck the second net. Mike reloaded, pumped six more shots into it below the water line. Three guns were roaring from the boat now. Mike felt a hot little burn on his scalp as one of the shotgun pellets buried itself there. He shot six times more.

The boat broke the second net and roared into the marsh. Its steady purring became a stutter, as if someone were trying to strangle the boat. Then the engine died and Mike knew that his bullets had done their work.

The boat had sunk.

THE men would be there when he wanted them unless they were complete fools. The boat would settle to the bottom. As long as they stood on it they would be safe. If they tried to leave they would be caught in the mud on the bottom of the marsh and drown.

But that, Mike thought, would be all right too.

He set his course straight to a small slough close to Maroff's lodge. Friendly hemlocks overhanging the slough hid his boat. Mike got out and took as many of the ducks as he could carry up to the lodge. He emptied them into a chute that led to the cellar and was used for dumping fuel.

When all the ducks were in Maroff's cellar, Mike returned to his boat. He rowed to his own landing, tied up there, and walked to his cottage.

One Eye, a gray shadow, melted into the darkness. Mike's door was opened by a lean man Mike had never seen before. He must be all right. One Eye had let him pass. Over the lean man's shoulder Mike saw the anxious, worried face of Laura.

"You all right, Mike?" she asked.

"Sure," he said. "Billy asleep?"

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"He was, until that young war started out on the marsh. Oh Mike!" She buried her face in his shoulder.

"Everything's all right," Mike soothed. "There ain't a thing wrong."

In the other room Billy Bartlett looked at him anxiously. The lean man stood silently near the head of Billy's bed.

"This is Joe Evans, my boss," Billy said. "The doctor telephoned him to come out."

"Glad to know you," Mike murmured.

"What was all the shooting about?" Billy demanded.

Mike inclined his head. The shooting —It had all died out. But other things lived, Laura and this young man who had risked his life to do his best.

Mike glanced at Joe Evans. Billy could go far in the warden service as soon as he got some experience. But there was nothing the matter with Joe Evans thinking he had some experience.

"Say, Billy," Mike asked, "how many times did you shoot at that boat last night?"

"Twice."

"Well," Mike said mildly, "you disabled it."

"What!" Joe Evans bellowed.

Billy stared at Mike; his amazement kept him silent.

"Billy disabled it," Mike repeated. "I was cruisin' around and come on it. It must have been on the marsh all day. The men in it cut loose at me, so I sunk it. They're out there now, and they'll be there until somebody goes out and picks 'em up."

A big smile broke over Joe Evans' face. "Where are they?"

Mike shrugged. "Out on the marsh. I'll show you. But they'll keep. I think you ought to get Maroff first. He's the one as has been buyin' the ducks. I looked in his cellar like you told me, Billy, and there's at least fifty ducks there."

Evans dashed for the door. "I'll see Maroff," he called over his shoulder. "I'll be right back."

Mike settled into a chair. Billy Bartlett was looking at him suspiciously.

"Forgetting the boat and how I disabled it," he said gently, "would you mind telling me how you found ducks in Maroff's cellar?"

"I put 'em there," Mike said mildly.

"You *what!*" Billy exploded.

"I put 'em there," Mike said again.

There was a silence then, while Mike sat smiling placidly.

"You know you can get Maroff in serious trouble?" Billy questioned seriously.

Mike shrugged. "That's what I calc'lated to do. Maroff's the one as has been buyin' the ducks. He's got a raft out in the marsh where he's been leavin' the money for the trappers. Last night on his way out, he come across a mink in one of my traps and stole it—though at the time I didn't know t'was him.

"About twenty minutes later I smelled mink, and come on two boats that had met at the raft. From the way the one hollered I knew he was trappin' ducks and sellin' em, but I still couldn't place Maroff until he come over here this mornin' and then I smelled mink on him.

"I figgered if you could get enough on him to bring him in for questionin', it wouldn't be hard to find out the rest."

"Do you know where the raft is?"

"Yeh," Mike said. "And I also know where is the money Maroff left on it. It's in my pocket. Unless I miss my guess by an awful long shot, it's goin' to help pay for a weddin' present."

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The Sun Sets at 5

By BORDEN CHASE

CHAPTER XXXI

SEA PROWLERS

AS HE spoke the plane staggered. Flame leaped from one of the motors and a wing crumpled. The tip whipped up and tore free. The big ship went into a side slip, rolled half over and started to spin. A figure leaped clear as the sound of the explosion reached the water. Another followed. Two more. Smooth watched the parachutes billow as the rip cords were pulled. He saw the plane nose over in a crazy loop, spin again and pancake on the water a mile distant.

"I thought the bomb was just goin' to rip out the ignition," said Rags. "That's what you told McNeary. Were you slippin' him the old cross?"

"Not quite," said Smooth. "But I had it slipped to me. Engel said the bomb was small—no bigger than a watch. I didn't think Center could pack enough explosive in a thing that size to tear off a wing. And that's where I underestimated Center."

"It must be powerful stuff," said Rags admiringly. "Maybe it's the new junk they're using in their torpedoes."

Smooth took the glasses and leveled them on the plane. The tail was high and he saw a boat racing toward it. Further off was the tug, smoke streaming from her funnel as she followed the speed boat. He looked up. The men in the parachutes were close to the water, drifting west with the wind.

"Let's go," he said. "We'll pick up the fliers."

Once again the motors leaped into life and the bow of the *Toots* lifted. She slid over a wave top, climbed and whipped into the next.

"What happens when they see our guns?" asked Rags. "Do we have to rough 'em up a little to make 'em behave?"

"They'll behave," promised Smooth.

Rags nodded. He throttled the motors and eased the boat alongside a flier who was struggling to free himself from the parachute harness. Jeff Link swung one huge paw over the side, grabbed the flier's arm and heaved. The man came dripping from the sea and was lowered into the forward cockpit. Frankie Norris helped him to sit erect, asked if he were all right and signaled to Rags. The little

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gunman steered over toward the next.

"Even money I catch him on the fly."

"Don't try," said Smooth. "You'll break his legs."

Again Jeff Link reached into the ocean and lifted out his man.

"I ain't had so much fun since Aunt Sarah died," said Rags. "Stand by to get another, Jeff."

When Link pulled his third man aboard Smooth saw it was Hodkins. He told Marron to bring him aft as Rags put over to pick up the last of the fliers. Smooth crouched beside Hodkins. He opened the army man's coat and pulled the muffler clear of his throat. Hodkins was chattering. His lips were blue from the dip in the water but he managed a smile as he looked up at Smooth.

"I've seen you before, haven't I?" he asked.

"Right. Sorry about the crackup, Hodkins. I didn't figure it in the deal but the Army can afford it if we get Center."

"If we get who?"

"Center," said Smooth. "Didn't Lyons tell you?"

"I haven't seen Lyons. He was in an automobile accident and didn't get back to Mitchell Field. We got a report from St. John's hospital that he was quite badly hurt so we had to substitute another man."

Smooth looked at the fourth flier Jeff Link had lifted into the boat. He was a youngster in his early twenties, frightened but game enough to laugh it down. It meant Center had marked up another score. In spite of Rags' men, Lyons had been stopped. Smooth turned to find the little gunman staring out across the water with eyes that were glazed with anger.

"A fine buncha bums, they are!" he said harshly. "Five of them, and they couldn't follow orders, no less. It's most exasperatin'. Wait'll I get back to town! I'll take them bums apart into pieces!"

"Don't let it throw you," advised Smooth. "Center has outsmarted more than five Federal men, Rags."

"Federal men!" said the gunman in disgust. "Would you be comparin' Federal men with my boys, no less?"

Hodkins, like the others, had pulled off his flying suit. The fabric had kept his uniform fairly dry and now Marron passed him an oilskin jacket. He put it on and looked quizzically at Smooth.

"What's all this talk of Center and Federal men?" he asked. "And how did you happen to be right here where we crashed? There's something funny about all this."

SMOOTH remembered the flier was in love with Nadja and expected to marry her. Either way the case broke, Hodkins was going to get hurt, but Smooth knew of no reason to make it worse. Nadja had been acting when she told Hodkins she loved him. Just as she had probably been acting with Smooth before she left to meet Center. He still didn't know if she had been telling the truth about her brother. It made little difference.

"It would take a week to give you the story," he said. "Espionage and a little murder on the side. There's a man called Center after the bomb-sight on your plane. And before we go any further I'd like to know if a crash like that will wreck the instrument."

"Not completely but it will be thrown out of line."

"Could an expert put it together well enough to learn the setup?"

"Any decent mechanic could! He wouldn't have to be an expert!" said

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Hodkins irritably. "But what's this about espionage?"

Smooth took a deep breath. "Nadja couldn't tell you, of course, but she's an espionage agent. She's working for the Government—just as you and I are. She had learned Center was trying to grab that bomb-sight and she was trying to prevent it. Then she met you and went for you in a big way. You can guess the rest. Because she was in love, she got careless. This morning we learned she had disappeared."

It was a clumsy lie but the best Smooth could do under pressure. At least it would keep Hodkins from asking too many questions at a time when they couldn't be answered. True, it hit the man hard, but this bump would be small in comparison to the one he would get if he learned Nadja had played him for a fool. Smooth handed him a cigarette, lit it and turned to Rags.

"Head in toward the coast," he said. "Those birds may have seen this. We'll let them think it was just an accidental rescue. When you get out of sight, swing wide and pick up the *Malay Princess*."

"Yeah, I guess they saw us," said Rags. He kept the glasses to his eyes. "They hooked on to the plane and lifted it. Just the front end. Some guys are climbin' on it—gettin' the sight, I guess."

Hodkins was on his feet. He had stumbled over the guns beneath the canvas. Now he lifted one and pointed toward the tug.

"Head straight for that tug!" he ordered. "I'm going aboard and keep an eye on that sight until it's returned to the Army."

"Sorry, Lieutenant," said Smooth. "If you tried to get aboard that tug you'd get hurt. Besides, I'm dealing the cards this hand and we're playing it different."

Hodkins swung the gun toward Smooth. "Do as I tell you," he said harshly. "I don't like the looks of you or your friends. I don't know what you're up to, but I do know you're going to put me aboard that tug!"

A HUGE hand reached over his shoulder and lifted the gun barrel. Another hand fastened around his wrist and twisted. Hodkins cursed as the gun was taken from him. Jeff Link laughed and shrugged his big shoulders. He pointed forward to Frankie Norris who leaned against the cabin rail holding an automatic in each hand. The guns covered the fliers.

"He don't like soldiers, Lieutenant," said Link. "Maybe you better sit down."

Rags had put the boat in speed. It leaped forward and the tug faded in the distance. The sun was an hour high and the wind was swinging to the north. A low bank of clouds lined the horizon. Smooth crossed his fingers and hoped the weather would hold. He crouched beside Hodkins in the after cockpit and made his last bid for peace aboard the *Toots*.

"There's a good chance Nadja will be aboard the *Malay Princess* within an hour or two," he said. "With her will be a girl who means plenty in my book. In less than ten hours a squadron of destroyers will close in on that freighter. When they do, those girls' numbers go up. If I get aboard there's a Chinaman's chance I can grab Center before he kills them. I don't know how it's going to be done, but it won't help any to have you in my hair. Now think hard and ask yourself why we bothered to pick you out of the ocean."

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He pointed toward Rags and his crew. "Do these birds look like a troop of Boy Scouts, out to do their good deed for the day?"

"They look like killers to me," said Hodkins slowly.

"That's one of their trades," said Smooth. "But this morning they're turning their guns the right way—toward Europe!"

Smooth rested his case.

Hodkins thought for a moment. At length he put out his hand. Smooth took it and motioned toward the forward cockpit. "Tell your pals about it. When the show opens, step up and buy yourself a seat."

Rags had held the *Toots* on a line toward the shore. Now he glanced at the compass on the instrument board and eased the wheel to send the boat in a long turn. Smooth looked toward the low line of beach. He tried to pick out landmarks.

"That's the Rockaways in there," said Rags. "We'll run out to the Point and circle back. The *Malay Princess* ought to be past Ten Buoy."

"Where's that?"

"Off Roamer Shoals. We'll pick up the black markers and follow 'em to Fairway—that's the end of the Ambrose Channel."

"Oke!"

Rags kept the speed down to lessen the pounding of the boat. Minutes slipped by. Many of them. As Smooth started to feel a growing impatience, Rags lifted his hand from the wheel and pointed ahead.

"There's the *Woots,*" he said simply. "Maybe we better toss some of these fliers on her, as it were. They clutter up the place, Smooth."

Kyle nodded.

"Not a bad idea. We'll let Hodkins stay with us and send the others along."

CHAPTER XXXII

SHELL FIRE

WHEN the boats cut their motors and drew alongside, Smooth asked the fliers to change over. There was a moment of argument and Frankie Norris looked inquiringly at Smooth. He pointed to his armpit but Smooth laughed and put things straight. Betts reported the *Malay Princess* was holding a speed that would put her out of the Channel within a half hour. No one had gone aboard, nor had anyone left.

The fliers were transferred and Dave Marron, who had been using the glasses, handed them to Rags.

"Speedboat comin' this way," he said. "Looks like the crate that was workin' with the tug. They musta spotted us."

Rags took the glasses. He laughed and handed them to Smooth. Then he motioned to Betts. "Scram! We'll handle these birds on our own, as it were. You keep after the *Malay Princess* and we'll see you later."

The *Toots* moved forward as Smooth lined the glasses on the approaching boat. It was low and fast, smaller than the *Toots,* with four men aboard. Smooth caught the glint of metal as the sun danced from a rifle barrel. He saw a flash and heard the whine of a bullet. Seconds later the flat report of the shot came across the water.

"An insult, no less!" said Rags. "Peggin' shots at me with a rifle!" He lifted the speed, headed straight for the oncoming boat and motioned to Frankie Norris. "Be so kind as to show them chumps a little shootin'. One burst, but good!"

Norris lifted a gun from the deck, braced himself in the forward cockpit and put the stock to his shoulder. There was a sharp chatter of exploding shells

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and the slugs drew a line on a wave top near the boat.

"Shame upon you!" said Rags. "Stop bein' nonsensical and get down to business!"

Again the gun chattered but the speedboat had swerved sharply, throwing a curtain of spray as her stern came about. An answering burst came across the water. And another. Slugs screamed overhead and Smooth heard one chug into the wood. Jeff Link lifted his huge hand like a schoolboy and looked at Rags. The little gunman shook his head.

"Not yet! Frankie gets one more chance!"

The gun hammered and Smooth saw a man crumple in the boat ahead. The *Toots* was drawing closer, eating the distance in giant leaps. Again Norris came down on the trigger. The boat swerved and leaped a wave. Rags yelled at Norris and told him to hand over the gun. Norris shook his head and pointed.

"Bingo!" he yelled. "I got 'em all, Rags!"

Smooth looked at the speeding boat. There was no one at the wheel. No one standing in the after cockpit. Rags signaled to Jeff Link and eased the bow of the *Toots* closer to the boat's stern —so close Smooth could read the gilt letters on the counter. She was the *Dancer* and she was living up to her name. Twice Rags moved in only to swerve quickly as the *Dancer* hit a wave and changed course. He tried a third time and Jeff stretched one long arm over the side, caught the gunwale and swung aboard.

Rags pulled wide as Jeff cut the ignition. The *Dancer* stopped and Rags drifted the *Toots* alongside. Norris jumped aboard, bent over the men in the cockpit and turned to look at Rags.

"Not so bad, considerin'," he said. "Want 'em over the side, or do we save 'em? The four o' them is through, but complete!"

Rags jerked a thumb toward the water and looked at Smooth. "Frankie ain't bad with a gun when he really tries. Not bad at a wheel, either. Maybe he and Jeff could work from the *Dancer,* eh?"

"Why not?" said Smooth. "If we pick up a few more, the *Malay Princess* will think she's in convoy."

Hodkins had been watching Jeff get rid of the *Dancer's* crew. His lips were drawn against his teeth and he looked sharply at Smooth. "They're not dogs, you know," he said quietly. "Can't we at least see they are buried?"

"Sorry," said Smooth. "This time we're playing marbles for keeps, Lieutenant. Center would have let you drown—you and a thousand more like you. He made the rules, not Smooth Kyle. But I can play his way." He turned to Rags. "Let's have a look at the *Malay Princess.* Not too close. I want to see how they get the bomb-sight aboard. Her crew is supposed to be on the level but I'm wondering."

RAGS followed the black channel-markers for a time, then he signaled to the *Dancer* and swung off to get clear of the ship lane. The newly recruited boat turned north and Norris indicated with a wave of his arm that he would meet the *Toots* further along. Smooth studied the forward horizon through the glasses and soon saw the masts and single funnel of the freighter. She was trailing a black plume from her stack and as the speedboat came closer Smooth could see two men on watch at the after gun. The cover had been removed and from the length and size of the barrel he judged the piece to be a six-inch.

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He felt Rag's hand on his arm and followed the direction of the gunman's upstretched arm. High overhead a seaplane was following the line of the channel. A fair sized cabin job and definitely not a navy plane. It banked as it reached the freighter and flew off to the east.

The chances were good that Center had been aboard that plane. In fact, Smooth decided they were better than good. It would have been the logical way for him to reach the *Malay Princess*. Much better than a speedboat. True, he might have started in a boat and transferred to the plane. He might have done a dozen things. There was just one certainty—soon after the sight was delivered to the freighter, Center would go aboard.

A half hour passed and the *Malay Princess* steamed ahead. Occasionally Smooth caught sight of the *Dancer* or the *Woots* as the boats cruised in wide circles, running slowly to conserve their gas. They were clear of the Ambrose Lightship and heading northeast when Rags cut the motor and reached for the glasses. He held them to his eyes for a time, watching the Marondale tug that had appeared in the ship lane. Five minutes passed. Ten. Rags rubbed his eyes, looked again and gave the glasses to Smooth.

"There's your answer," he said with the air of a magician who has pulled a rabbit from a hat. "See them signal flags on the tug?"

"What do they mean?"

"Roughly speaking as it were," said Rags, "they mean she's sinking an' needs immediate help—or words to that effect. The smart boys on the tug pulled her in the lane and scuttled her. Now the freighter stops and Center's mob goes aboard. Very pretty, indeed."

Using the glasses, Smooth noticed the tug was listing. Her bow was down and the freighter was increasing her pace to pull alongside. A boat was put over. It made one trip and then another. While Smooth watched, the *Toots* raced past the freighter, swung wide and headed toward her sister. As she drew close, Betts cut the motors and waved an arm.

"Nice, eh?" he called. "They put twenty men aboard that scow right under the skipper's nose."

"Were there any women in those boats?" asked Smooth.

"Yeah—two of them. I think one was Gilda but I ain't sure. Here comes Norris in the *Dancer*. Maybe he seen better."

The second speedboat drew alongside and Smooth repeated his question.

"I didn't know who they were," said Norris. "I didn't get too close on account of the seaplane. It came down near the tug a while ago and put the women aboard. Two guys were with them. If I'd pulled closer, they might have wised up. What gives now?"

RAGS looked at Smooth and waited. So did Hodkins. The other boats had pulled close alongside and were running with their motors throttled. Smooth looked toward the distant freighter. He saw she had started a turn, steamed part way around and then returned to her course. The tug's bow had settled, lifting the stern high. A column of steam burst from her funnel. A dull explosion echoed across the water and the tug sank.

"Any ideas?" asked Rags.

"A few," said Smooth. "And they're all terrible."

"Call one."

Smooth pointed to the other boats. "I want them to stay clear for a while. If Center's mob haven't taken over, I

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may be able to get aboard the *Malay Princess.*"

"What happens to Gilda?"

"It's a long shot, Rags, but we've got to play it. It would be natural for the skipper to bring them up to the bridge—Center and the girls, at least. Center will keep a gun on Gilda but it may take a little time before he's in a position to take command of the ship. There's a British gun crew aboard, a dozen men on deck, and some of the officers will be in their cabins. If Center can't make his move, I may beat him to it."

"How?"

"We'll swing wide and pull into the freighter's lane, just as the tug did. Then we'll work the distress gag and ask to be taken aboard."

Rags shook his head. "It's so corny it might work at that. But what do we use for signals? This ain't exactly a pleasure boat and we never bothered about rockets and such."

Hodkins touched Smooth's arm. "I can help with that, I think. What message do you want sent?"

"Say we're out of gas and the seams are sprung. Tell him anything but try to make it stick."

Hodkins took out his knife and cut two squares from the canvas cover that had been over the guns. Rags nodded in understanding, reached into a locker and brought out a long galvanized pump. He drew out the wooden handle, broke it into halves and handed them to the lieutenant. He gunned the motor, waved to the other boats and headed toward the horizon. Hodkins squatted on the deck, took a piece of whiteline from a locker and bound the squares of canvas to the improvised sticks.

Smooth thought he had seen speed before. Now the *Toots* lifted on her step and sent two broad sheets of water arching from her bow. Wind slashed against his face and drove him to his knees beside Hodkins. He braced himself against the side of the cockpit and wondered when the leaping speed boat would split wide open. Simply Davis was smiling now. He had opened the hatch covers above the motors and crouched with his head cocked to one side, listening to the roar of the powerful machines.

His lips moved and he nodded his head. "Simply wonderful! Simply marvelous!"

The words were lost but Smooth got the meaning. He didn't agree. Each time the *Toots* leaped, his head snapped back and he felt the jar through the length of his spine. When he lifted his head to look for the freighter and the wind turned his eyelids in and blinded him. He squatted down and rubbed them with his knuckles. Minutes passed. Smooth lost track of time. He lost track of distance. Lost track of everything but the roaring rush of the wind above his head. Suddenly it lessened. The motors lowered their tune and the *Toots* slowed. Rags cut the switch and grinned at Smooth.

"How'd you like it?" he asked.

"Not bad," said Smooth.

"Not bad? Why, it was perfect, no less!" said Rags indignantly. He pointed to a locker. "You'll find goggles in there. You an' Hodkins better put 'em on when the freighter gets here. No use tippin' your hand to Center."

"How long must we wait?"

"Oh, about ten minutes. We're lined up with her nice if she don't change course."

SMOOTH found two pairs of goggles in the locker. He found other things that brought a smile as he examined them—beer cans filled with rivets and

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sand with a short stick of dynamite wedged in the center. A fuse extended through the metal cover. A short fuse with a split tip. Smooth balanced one of the improvised grenades in his hand.

"Very effective, no less," said Rags proudly. He turned to Davis for confirmation. "Ain't they good, pal?"

"Simply wonderful!" said Davis.

Smooth closed the locker, handed a pair of goggles to Hodkins and wondered what would have happened if a bullet from the *Dancer* had clipped one of those simply wonderful grenades. He put on his goggles and stood to watch the blunt bow of the *Malay Princess* coming toward them. The freighter's whistle sounded. Hodkins lifted his flags and started his message. He finished it and waited. There was no answer and he started again.

The *Malay Princess* sounded her whistle again and pulled to starboard. Rags had been studying the bridge through the glasses. He handed them to Smooth and pointed. Smooth lifted his goggles, put the glasses to his eyes and looked at the bridge. An officer had come to the dodger. A second joined him.

Then Smooth noticed two men standing behind the officers. Close to them. Others were at the rails on the low steel decks, watching the speed boat as the freighter moved past. A line of signal flags was run up to the yard. Rags Donovan cursed slowly and thoroughly. He cursed the *Malay Princess* and he cursed the crew. He cursed the captain and each of the mates.

"Settle down and tell me what these flags mean!" said Smooth.

"Roughly speakin'," said Rags, "it means get t'hell out a here or we'll sink you. And he called us Germans, no less!"

"Does that check with you, Lieutenant? Do you read it the same way?"

"Yes," said Hodkins. "But I can't understand why they've run up such a message,"

"I can," said Smooth. He lifted the glasses and studied the bridge again. "A dollar gets you twenty that Center has a gun at the skipper's back."

"Can you see Center? Is Nadja there?"

"I can only see the officers."

"T'hell with them," said Rags. "What gives back aft?"

Smooth swung the glasses. His shoulders jerked as though he had been hit. "Get going!" he cried. "Fast, Rags! The gun crew is swinging the six-inch!"

The motor roared into life before he had finished speaking. Rags spun the wheel and the boat doubled like a frightened thing. A flare of flame and powder smoke belched from the gun on the freighter's stern. The crash of the discharge bucketed across the water. The shell was high but it screamed as it passed.

"What a compliment!" yelled Rags. "Flattery, no less! Now the bums are usin' the right kind of guns to fight Rags Donovan!"

He whipped the wheel from side to side, dancing the *Toots* over the wave tops. He changed course, doubled and twisted. Again the six-inch thundered and a shell sang its thin tune. Beyond them a column of water lifted where it hit.

"Very sloppy shootin', said Rags. "But very!"

Smooth and Hodkins were down in the cockpit. The gyrations of the boat had thrown them flat. Even the silent Simply Davis was holding on with both hands while Dave Marron crouched forward and rolled his head to ease the shocks.

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It lasted five minutes and during that time the gun crew tried twice with shots that were high. At length they were in the clear and Rags headed toward the other boats. When he reached them, he cut the motors and wiped his forehead.

"He who fights and runs away," he said knowingly, "keeps from gettin' his ears pinned back. An' now we'll talk things over, as it were. Any more ideas, Smooth?"

"One good idea," said Smooth slowly. "The next time you tangle with a six-inch gun, don't take so long to get out of range!"

"A complaint, no less!" said Rags indignantly. "Why, we was practically flyin'."

"But in the wrong direction," said Smooth. "The gun was mounted aft. I couldn't fire forward of the beam. All you had to do was keep ahead of the freighter."

"Am I ashamed!" said Rags. He shook his head. "Now why didn't I think of that sooner?"

Smooth didn't answer. He could think of a dozen things that might have been done, but it was too late now. He didn't blame Rags. Automatics and submachine guns were tough, but the flare of a six-inch was something Rags had just seen for the first time.

CHAPTER XXXIII

HIGH NOON

AS FOR the *Malay Princess*—the skipper had probably given the order to fire in order to keep his backbone in one piece. Smooth didn't blame him. Undoubtedly the captain figured his bridge had been taken over by the enemy. Alive, he might find some way to regain command. Dead, he could do nothing.

Smooth didn't blame the British gun crew, either. This was war time and any strange boat was under suspicion. Right now they probably thought they had done a good morning's work.

That wouldn't last long. Center had twenty men aboard the *Malay Princess*. Some of them would wander aft to congratulate the gun crew. Then the crew would be disarmed and made prisoners. The deck force would be next, and then the black gang. Twenty men with guns could handle a crew of fifty with little trouble.

That was the setup as Smooth figured it. He told it to the others.

"Them guys better practice up a little before sunset," said Rags wisely. "It's goin' to be fun watchin' them tangle with a few destroyers." He stopped and shook his head when he saw Smooth's face had gone gray. "Sorry, pal. I forgot about Gilda. Do you think he—"

"I don't know what he's done to her," said Smooth dully. "But there's no use trying to run a bluff any longer. He knows we're out to get him."

Hodkins had been leaning against the instrument panel while Smooth talked with Rags. Now he stepped forward. "You haven't told me much about Gilda but I think I understand." There was a set coldness in his tone. "You see—Nadja is aboard that ship, too. She's the girl I hope to marry. If anything has happened to her, I don't want the destroyers to take the *Malay Princess*. That would mean a military trial for Center. And it isn't easy to prove a man a murderer in court. Center might get off with imprisonment."

"Center won't get a trial," promised Smooth.

"Have you thought of a way to prevent it?"

"Not yet."

"Will you listen to a suggestion?"

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"Why not?"

Hodkins pointed to the *Dancer*. "I think I can handle that boat. Not too well, but good enough to run it alongside the freighter. Once we get there, we will at least have the satisfaction of using a gun." He motioned toward Rags and the others. "I don't expect them to join us. It isn't their quarrel."

"Fancy that, now!" shouted Rags. "Here I go an' donate my services to Uncle Sammy, an' you try to deal me out!" He looked at Davis and shook his head in disgust. "Is that nice, Simply? Is that the way to treat a guy, I ask you?"

"Simply terrible," said Davis. "Simply disgusting!"

Jeff Link had rested one big hand on the gunwale of the *Dancer*. He lifted it and pointed to the distant freighter. "I don't let nobody shoot cannons at me and get by with it—not ever! If you take the *Dancer*, mister—I go along!"

Frankie Norris didn't bother to protest. He was examining the mechanism of a sub-machine gun and he looked up just long enough to wink at Rags. Walter Betts had seated himself on the gunwale of the *Woots*, and he too looked at Rags and dropped one slow lid. The others in his crew laughed. The fliers merely looked at Smooth and waited for orders.

"It looks as though we're going to have company," said Smooth. He opened the locker in the after cockpit, took out two of the improvised grenades and turned to Rags. "Who takes care of this department?"

"Dave Marron can toss 'em for us," said Rags. "They've got more on the *Woots* an' Betts is handy with 'em. Frankie does better with a gun."

"Then why are we waiting?" said Smooth. "Circle the freighter and come at her from the bow. Keep in line until we get in close, then we'll take the starboard side as the *Woots* goes to port. Norris and Jeff can lie back and try to pick off the men on the bridge."

RAGS touched the starter button and the *Toots* climbed up onto her step. The *Woots* swung into line and the *Dancer* brought up the rear. Rags Donovan looked back over his fleet—five men in the first boat, seven in the second and two in the last. He nodded his head in satisfaction and advanced the throttle. The line moved forward, gathering speed as it swung in a wide circle out of range of the freighter's gun.

Dave Marron had taken a dozen grenades from the locker and placed them on the canvas in the after cockpit. He lit a cigarette and examined the fuse tips. Simply Davis had left his motors and was standing forward with a sub-machine gun under his arm. Hodkins was examining the mechanism of his gun and Smooth tried a short burst to get the feel.

The *Toots* completed her long circle and headed toward the *Malay Princess*. Rags lifted his hand, signaled to Betts and steered toward the freigher's starboard bow.

"Now let's see how good you are!" he shouted. "Orders from Admiral Rags Donovan!"

The tall bow of the freighter acted as a shield but Smooth saw men running forward along the deck. Each carried a gun and one paused to try a snap shot. Simply Davis spread his legs and braced one knee against the side of the forward cockpit. He pushed his cheek against the gun stock and came down on the trigger. Hodkins had opened with a short burst.

Smooth waited. He saw a man level-

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ing a rifle from the bridge. There was a puff of smoke and Smooth tightened on the trigger of his gun.

It chattered and drew a line on the gray paint of the freighter's superstructure. Smooth tried again. He could see the rivets in the side plates rushing toward him and he braced himself, waiting for the crash when the *Toots* hit. Instead, a sudden turn threw him against the side of the cockpit.

As he fell he saw Dave Marron touch the tip of his cigarette to a fuse and toss the grenade onto the deck of the *Malay Princess.*

There was confusion aboard the freighter. The makeshift grenade exploded, spraying the forward deck with slugs. Another crashed and there was the sound of a sub-machine gun chattering on the port side. Rags had come about and was heading in close. Smooth waved an arm—told him to keep clear so he and Hodkins could get in a few shots.

Rags shook his head. "I ain't had such fun since Aunt Sally died!" he yelled. "Wait'll Dave gets rid of his pineapples. You'll get a turn—don't worry!"

Marron tossed another; lit the next and threw it. Smooth looked across the water to where the *Dancer* had taken her position. She was moving slowly while Frankie Norris steadied himself and worked his gun with the precision of a mechanic at a lathe.

Smooth felt something tug at the sleeve of his oilskin jacket. Wood splinters flew from the gunwale and he turned to see flashes of gunfire coming from a porthole in one of the deck houses. Soon another gun joined the first. The decks were clear and the freighter was swinging hard over.

Smooth grabbed Rags' shoulder. He pointed to the after gun that was coming to bear on the *Dancer.* Still Frankie Norris went on about his business.

"The fool!" yelled Smooth. "They'll blow him out of the water! Why doesn't he get clear?"

RAGS swung the *Toots* and raced toward the distant *Dancer.* Smooth lined up his gun and showered a stream of slugs across the bow of the boat, trying to attract Frankie's attention. It was no use. Norris was busy. He didn't even take the gun from his shoulder. Jeff Link was crouching in the stern of the boat, trying an occasional burst. He saw the splashes from Smooth's gun and looked up. Rags yelled and pointed. Jeff leaped toward the wheel.

The six-inch on the stern of the freighter spewed flame and thunder. Less than five hundred yards. The shell hit the boat and the *Dancer* disappeared. One moment it was there—the next it had vanished. A shower of wood and steel rained down on the *Toots.* As Rags spun the wheel Simply Davis dropped his gun, put both hands to his throat and slipped to the deck.

Dave Marron climbed forward. He glanced once at Davis, turned and curved the index finger of each hand against the thumb, forming a pair of circles—double zero. Simply Davis was through.

Rags was circling to reach the bow of the freighter again when Smooth touched his shoulder. "Pull ahead and call the others," he said. "We're getting nowhere fast!"

"What do you mean—nowhere?" said Rags. "I bet we knocked off a dozen of them mugs! I'll settle for eight, no less!"

"We won't get any more this way," said Smooth. "We've cleared the decks but we can't shoot through steel. They'll fire from the ports and pick us off as

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we go by. It was a good try but it can't be worked twice."

They were ahead of the freighter and the *Woots* was racing toward them in answer to Rags' signal. There had been seven men aboard why they left. Now there were three who were able to stand. Rags didn't ask questions Neither did Smooth. He waited until the boats were running close with the motors throttled and pointed to the freighter.

"Watch her bow," he said. "Don't get too far away or she'll swing and get us under her gun. If she turns, swing with her."

"Okay," said Betts. "I seen what happened to Frankie."

Smooth took off the oilskin coat and reached for his automatic. He glanced at the clip and put the gun back in its leather. He had seen some shells in the after locker and he put a few in his pocket. Rags watched him curiously. The little gunman had offered a cigarette to Hodkins. Now he offered one to Smooth and held a match. Smooth drew deep and seated himself on the edge of the cockpit. He looked at the sun that had been climbing toward the zenith. Soon it would start toward the distant horizon.

"One more favor, Rags," he said. "Ask Betts to run along the port side again. Tell him to keep close up and toss the rest of his pinepapples. You run along the starboard side and I'll try to make the deck."

"You mean go aboard, no less?"

"Why not? What have I got to lose?"

"Your brains!"

"I lost them when Center grabbed Gilda," said Smooth slowly. "Be a good guy and let me make one more try to even things with him."

Rags didn't argue. Death was a constant customer in his trade. It didn't frighten him and he knew it didn't frighten Smooth. He passed the orders along to Betts and advanced the throttle. Dave Marron lit a fresh cigarette and picked up two grenades. He dipped into the locker and offered a new drum of shells to the lieutenant. Hodkins shook his head.

"I'm going along with Smooth."

"It's your skull," said Marron disinterestedly. He put away the drum.

Rags took one hand from the wheel and dipped under his arm. He handed his gun to Hodkins and grinned. "Take good care of it, feller. It's an import, no less! But the best!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

CENTER WITH HIS MASK OFF

THE bow of the freighter was close and the *Woots* swung to strike at her port side. Rags eased off on the throttle and swung in behind. When he followed the wake left by the speeding boat, Smooth looked at him in surprise.

"The other side, Rags!" he shouted.

"Act your age," answered Rags. "Did you expect to grab that scow with us passin' her at thirty?"

The guns at the freighter's ports had started to fire and the men in the *Woots* were answering. A grenade arched over the bow and landed on the forward deck. It exploded and another followed as the boat slid into a turn.

Rags was holding the *Toots* wide. He flashed past the fountain of spray left by the *Woots* and headed for the stern of the freighter. The wheel went hard over and the boat spun. Rags eased off on the throttle and drew alongside the quarter.

He motioned to Smooth as the gunwale touched. The deck was less than eight feet above.

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"See you in hell, pal!" he called. "Save me a seat up front!"

Smooth jumped.

His fingers caught the rim of the side plate and he drew himself on board. Hodkins had leaped with him. The lieutenant's hands held for an instant and then pulled free. Smooth heard him curse as he fell back into the boat.

Then Rags gunned the motor and the *Toots* raced ahead. Dave Marron tossed a grenade at the bridge and another on the forward deck. They burst and a shower of slugs hummed through the air.

Smooth ran toward the after deckhouse. Above it were mounted the gun and platform. Four men were at the six-inch and they stood there, undecided for a moment as to the next move. One shouted an order. Another lifted an automatic. Smooth got his own clear and lined it.

"From me to you," he said and squeezed.

It was a hit and Smooth waited just long enough to score a miss with his second shot. Then he ran for the cover of the platform, grabbed the knob of the first door and twisted.

It opened and he stepped into a passage that ran across the small deckhouse. Four inner doors led to staterooms for the petty officers and gun crew. Smooth didn't stop to examine them. Nearby was a ladder leading down to the steam-steering engine room where an automatic motor drove the tiller of the *Malay Princess* back and forth over a steel arc.

Smooth had reached the first step when a man appeared at the door on deck. He was cold against the sky and he grabbed his chest as Smooth fired. The freighter rolled heavily and the door slammed shut.

Smooth went down three steps, turned and looked along the passageway. So far, so good! The bulkheads were steel and so was the overhead. Smooth could command the passage. If anyone came out of the staterooms they would walk into trouble, just as would anyone who opened either door at the passage ends.

They could rush him, of course. In that case Smooth would climb down the ladder to the steam-steering engine room. And that was his last ace. They couldn't get him out while his shells lasted, and he could put the freighter out of commission by wrecking her steering gear.

Stalemate!

But Smooth didn't think they would rush him. Center had only taken about twenty men aboard the *Malay Princess*. Rags and his mob had accounted for at least eight. Smooth had dropped two. That left ten—enough for a try but hardly enough to keep the freighter's crew under control if Smooth could chalk up a few more hits.

HE WAS safe for a time, but it would be suicide to step out on deck. Smooth refilled the clip, slipped it back into his gun and lit a cigarette. It tasted sour and he rubbed it against the deck. A half hour passed. Then the port door opened to admit a crack of light. A folded sheet of paper was pushed through the slit and the door was closed again.

"Oh, we play games, eh?" said Smooth softly.

He waited until five minutes had ticked past. Then he crept quietly along the passage, gun in his hand and a wish in his mind. He reached the note, turned and crept back to the ladder. Here, he opened the paper and held it under the light.

He read:

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It was a swell show, Handsome. I watched from a port until one of your playmates almost tossed a pineapple into my lap. Now Center wants to make a deal before you toss a crowbar into the steering gear.

As long as you have practically accepted his first offer (whatever that was) he says you would be a chump not to go through with it. He wants both of us to leave the ship immediately and will signal Rags to come up under the stern and take us off. There will be no one on the six-inch gun and none of his men on deck. He is sending me aft to open the passage door as proof this is not a cross. He knows he couldn't make me walk you into a bullet. Think it over, darling.

Gilda.

Smooth came alive as he read. For hours he had been moving through a dream. An impossible dream in which he wandered about as a living thing while actually he was dead. From the moment the freighter's gun had fired he was convinced Center had killed Gilda. And he had been wrong. A hundred percent wrong!

He read the message again, picking each sentence apart. Analyzing it. Obviously, Center believed Smooth had kept the first note to himself—that he had made one last wild attempt to take the freighter with a gang of killers.

Center didn't know McNeary had seen the note. Center didn't know a squadron of destroyers would close in on him at five o'clock. If he could keep Smooth from wrecking the steering gear, Center figured to get clear. And just once, he had guessed wrong!

The deal was as airtight as it could be made. Center was anxious. In fact, he was over-anxious. His offer to send Gilda aft proved that. Smooth read the note a third time, listening to the constant clank of the steering gear as he did. First the rudder went hard to port. Then to starboard.

The *Malay Princess* was writing her name on the Atlantic as Center waited to see how his note would be answered. If the rudder stopped moving it would mean Smooth had turned down the offer.

Again Smooth looked at Gilda's last sentence. He wanted to think. He tried to think. Weariness smudged his thoughts and ran them into a slow pool that turned and turned. The steering gear clanked as the pistons drove the tiller across the arc. The stern of the freighter lifted and slid over the waves. Smooth held the note in one hand and his gun in the other. Then he heard a sharp knock on the passage door. The knob turned and he lifted his gun.

"HELLO, you crazy clown," said Gilda. She opened the door wide and stood on deck smiling at him. "Stay where you are. I made a better deal with Center. It would have been too easy for him to pick you off from the bridge. I told him to build a screen across the after deck before I'd ask you to come out. Some of his men are doing it now."

"Thanks, Gorgeous," called Smooth. "Tell them to work fast or I'll put this tub into a spin."

"Don't worry. He's in more of a hurry than you are."

She turned and spoke to one of the men, motioned with her hand as though directing him to make something higher. Smooth heard sounds that might have been made by hatchcovers being tossed onto the deck. He heard hammers blows and the screech of tearing wood. Soon Gilda nodded and waved her hands in a brushing motion. She walked forward out of sight, was gone for a moment and then returned. She was carrying an automatic now and she held it up for Smooth to see.

"Come on, handsome. Your pal has outsmarted himself."

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"What happens when someone comes in the opposite door?"

"Stop worrying. The stern is clear."

Smooth walked quickly along the passage. He stepped onto the deck and looked forward. A barricade of hatch covers and cases from the cargo hold had been erected just beyond the forward end of the deckhouse. It extended from the rail to the hatch combing and effectively screened the stern from the gunfire. That is, it would serve as a screen to anyone who crouched. Gilda was standing erect. She was pointing to a single figure who stood in the wing of the bridge.

"Center waited to say hello," she said. "Then he's going below. He's already signaled to Rags and the boat is coming in." She turned to Smooth and laughed. "Well—say something! Don't tell me you've forgotten our old pal Dave Haley."

Smooth hardly heard her. He was staring at the man on the bridge, wondering if he could get him with a fast shot. The chances were a hundred to one against it and Haley didn't shorten them.

"I know how you feel, Smooth," he called. "It's mutual, pal!"

He waved once and stepped out of sight. Smooth turned to Gilda and she pointed to her cheek.

"A quick one, handsome. We're going to be busy in a minute."

Smooth stepped forward to kiss her. Gilda turned, put a hand to his lips and then brought it sharply across his cheek.

"I'd know that stuff of Nadja's a mile," she said. "Why don't you learn to carry a handkerchief?"

"Huh?" said Smooth. He rubbed his lips with the back of his hand. A red stain showed on his knuckles and he remembered the last few moments in Nadja's penthouse. He laughed. "It all comes under the heading of business, beautiful. And how have you been?"

Gilda pointed toward the *Toots*. The speedboat was coming fast, weaving from side to side as it circled to swing in under the stern. Smooth's smile grew broader. It was well past noon. In a few hours a destroyer would put a shot across the bow of the *Malay Princess*.

"Go aft and get ready to climb aboard," he said. "I'll watch the bridge until you clear."

"Oh, grow up!" said Gilda. She lifted her gun and leveled it at the bow of the *Toots*. "We're staying right here, handsome."

She fired once and the shell whipped a splinter from the forward gunwale. She tilted the gun and fired three times. The *Toots* slid into a turn that threw spray in a glistening sheet. Smooth jumped forward to grab her gun and Gilda jabbed her elbow into his stomach. He doubled over as she crouched beside him and a sub-machine gun hammered on the bridge. The slugs tore splinters from the hatch covers, spanged against the deckhouse and screamed overhead.

"Talk fast, beautiful, before I toss you over the side!" yelled Smooth. "Are you nuts—or am I?"

She lifted her gun and fired toward the bridge, not with care but seemingly on general principle. Then she knelt beside Smooth and put out her hand.

"Got any shells to fit a thirty-eight, darling?"

Smooth took the gun and pulled out the clip. "I'm still wondering why you committed suicide, angel."

"Oh, I just didn't think you wanted Dave Haley to take the bomb-sight to Europe," she said quietly. "And don't tell me the destroyers ar on the way to grab him. He probably guessed that

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just as I did, but he figures to outsmart them."

"From the beginning!" said Smooth.

"THERE isn't any beginning," said Gilda. "I thought it was strange when Haley didn't recognize Dick Frohm and George Condon at the Club Yvonne. That stuff about his eyes being bad didn't make sense. He'd recognize me at the same distance. So I started to ask questions.

"I visited Frohm at the Astor and learned he had given Haley his first job on that newspaper in Kansas City. He was just a reporter and not a very good one. Never went out with the others and wasn't a good mixer. But he saved his money and took a vacation in Europe. When he came back, he hooked up with a New York paper and started to put across one beat after another. He could dig up more important news in a day than most men could in a month. That got him a column and a byline."

"Never mind his history," said Smooth impatiently. He stuffed shells into the clip and ducked as another burst came from the bridge. "How did you learn he was Center?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you, handsome," said Gilda sweetly. "Haley never went back to Kansas City. He told us that at the club. Even when his mother and brother were killed—he stayed in New York. His column got more important and was always filled with gossip that could have been gathered by people in a foreign diplomatic service at Washington, or by a huge group of espionage agents spread across the country. With information of this kind, Haley became important."

"Yeah," said Smooth. "Important enough to sell out his country."

"Not exactly," said Gilda. "The United States isn't his country. It was the country of the original Dave Haley who went to Europe and never came back. It isn't the country of the man who looked like him—a young foreign espionage agent who came back to America on Haley's passport, used his name, stepped into the newspaper field and lived completely as Dave Haley. That's Center—the man who will tear your ears off with the next burst if you don't keep your head down!"

Almost as though he had heard her speak, Center or one of his men sent a shower of slugs against the deckhouse bulkhead. Another gun joined in and then another. Strips of wood tore from the hatch covers. Smooth grabbed Gilda's arm and pushed her into the passage.

"If you knew this about Haley," he said, "why didn't you let me take him last night at Lindy's?"

"It was only a guess, then," said Gilda. "Condon told me he had covered police news with Haley for a year. It didn't seem logical for a reporter to forget a face he'd seen so often. Then Marie told you about Frederick.

"When you passed it along to me it explained Haley's reason for helping us get Hesson back. Haley needed him —needed the *Malay Princess*. But Frederick had overheard your conversation with Hesson at the Club. He figured Hesson as an enemy and wanted to question him. Dave Haley —or rather, Center used the Group to get rid of Frederick, just as he used them to get Buckley and Whitman."

"But why didn't you tell me?" Smooth insisted.

Gilda laughed. "I know you too well, darling. You'd have grabbed Center and he'd have made a fool of you. Your story wouldn't stand up in court. You couldn't prove Center wasn't the real

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Dave Haley. The original Haley was tortured for days while questioners pumped him for facts about his family, friends, schooling and early life. It's an old trick. Center explained it to me this morning on the bridge."

Smooth shook his head. "I don't understand why he didn't let one of his agents do this part of the job."

"Think hard, Handsome," said Gilda. "That bomb-sight would have made Center a hero in his own country. It was the most important piece of espionage work ever attempted. But he couldn't hope to compete with our own agents forever. Things were getting tight. It was time for him to get out, and Center knew it."

There were a thousand questions pounding in Smooth's ears. It was as though another man stood beside him and asked: Why? When? How? He sorted out the most important and tried them. Gilda waited until he had tossed a few shots forward to keep Center's men from rushing the deckhouse, then she answered.

CHAPTER XXXV

ONE LAST EXIT

SHE had never trusted Nadja, but had let Smooth play Nadja's game hoping a break would give her some real evidence against Haley. Last night in Lindy's the chance had come.

When Smooth left to take Mark Hesson's call, Gilda had made Lieutenant Lyons promise he would report the scheme to his commanding officer and cancel the flight. Only Lyons and Dave Haley had heard that. And with Smooth and Lyons as witnesses, she could prove it in court if an attempt were made against Lyons on the way back to Mitchell Field.

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When she left the restaurant with Dave, she had reached into her purse for her gun, meaning to take him to her apartment until word came from Lyons. Haley had been too smart.

"What did he do?" asked Smooth.

Gilda rubbed her jaw. "I think it was a left, darling," she said mournfully. "It might have been a right, though. I woke up in a speedboat with Nadja rubbing my wrists. We changed to a plane and—here we are."

"Then Nadja is really working with Haley?"

Gilda smiled. "I ought to lie to you, Handsome, but I won't," she said. "Nadja is on the level. I heard her ask Haley to send the message for the release of her brother but I think he'll cross her just as he's crossed everyone else. She's in her cabin now, waiting for an answer from Europe.

Smooth felt better, but he still hadn't learned why Gilda had chased Rags Donovan. Like a dozen other things in this crazy setup, it didn't make sense. He listened until another flare of shots had come from the bridge, looked out of the passage and tried to find a target.

As he did, the chatter of a submachine gun came across the water. The *Toots* had circled and was racing past the freighter while Hodkins and Dave Marron emptied their guns at the bridge. An answering scatter of shots came from the far side and above it sounded the roar of the *Woots'* motors.

Smooth started toward the ladder that led down to the steam-steering engine room. He stopped at the top and motioned to Gilda.

"What was that crack about Haley guessing the destroyers?" he asked. "And why are we still on this rifle range?"

"I've told you, angel," said Gilda. "I knew you wouldn't be out here unless you'd covered yourself by having destroyers waiting further out. Haley guesses just as fast as I do. But for some reason he was more than anxious to get you off. Now you tell me why."

"Riddles!" said Smooth.

He climbed down to the engine room and looked at the huge steel tiller. It was steady at the center of the arc. The *Malay Princess* was holding to a straight course. Smooth hunted about until he found some tools—a hammer, pinch bar and stillson wrench. He waited for the tiller to swing. Then he frowned.

The man at the wheel on the bridge was holding her steady. There was no motion in the tiller. Smooth waited for the helmsman to ease the wheel a little. Still the tiller stayed rock steady.

Then he knew. Center realized Smooth would do this. Orders had been given to the man at the wheel to hold her as she went. And Center was waiting his opportunity to rush the after deck house. He'd taken a long chance and missed. Rags and his men were holding him off. Now he had taken the next best bet and put the *Malay Princess* on a course that wouldn't be changed.

Smooth made that double certain by chocking the cogwheel of the tiller. He wedged the stillson into place on the arc, drove the pinchbar on the other side of the tiller and then added every piece of steel he could find. When he was finished, the *Malay Princess* was booked for a straight passage. Eventually the wind and waves would swing her off, but whichever way she headed —that way she would go.

GILDA was at the passage door when he returned. She pointed across the water toward a white wake

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a thousand yards off the quarter.

"There's the answer to your riddle, darling," she said. "Now you know how Center intended to run the blockade with the bomb-sight."

Smooth nodded. This was the answer—a periscope. A perfect answer, too.

As Smooth watched the v-shaped wake he saw in it the symbol of perfect military preparedness. In Center's scheme, nothing had been left to chance. A lesser man might have gambled on the weather—used the tug to contact the submarine. But not Center. He took no chances.

By using the *Malay Princess* he was in a position to wait for days, if necessary, before he made the final transfer. That is, he would have been had it not been for Smooth and Gilda and two speedboats filled with a gun-crazy hijackers.

These had changed the setup. And even now Center's men were making their greatest bid. Guns tore at the barricade, shredding the wood and splitting the cases. Slugs rattled like hailstones against the deckhouse. Rags Donovan was doing his best. He had run in close, gambling while Dave Marron tossed two of his improvised grenades at the bridge. Betts and his men were pouring it in.

In spite of the boats, Center and his men would rush the deckhouse soon. Smooth wanted a porthole from which he could reach them. Two of the cabins faced forward. He tried the nearest door and found it locked. Gilda called to him and again pointed toward the sea.

The sub had lifted and her decks were awash—long decks, built above a submarine equal in size to the old *Deutschland* that had carried cargo across the Atlantic twenty-four years ago. There was a six-inch gun on the forward deck and men were running toward it. Others were setting up a machine gun on a bridge swivel.

Rags Donovan was game. He swung the *Toots* and made his bid. He was answered with a stream of shots that spun him away from the wheel. Smooth didn't wait to see any more. There was an axe in a bracket near the stateroom door. He pulled it free and hacked at the tough wood. It splintered and he tore a strip free, put his hand through and twisted the knob.

Men were seated on the deck with their hands and feet bound tightly. Others were in the bunks. Red-faced men with angry eyes—the British gun crew of the *Malay Princess*. Prisoners of war as an escort for Center when he delivered the bomb-sight.

Smooth cut away the lashings. "There's a sub off the beam and we're due to catch hell!" he said quickly. "I'll answer your questions later if we're not sunk. Who's the gunner's mate?"

"I am," said a tall, lean man. He climbed to his feet. "What th' blinkin' 'ell goes on aboard this ship, eh? Blime, if it ain't enough to drive a man balmy!"

"Later!" cried Smooth. "Lend a hand with these lashings and take three men up to the gun. You need a pointer and trainer, but you and the sight-setter can handle the loads. Get going and keep your heads down!" He motioned to the other five and handed the axe to the nearest, a giant of a man with tattoed knuckles. "Grab whatever you can and come with me. We're going to rush the bridge to keep your mates from being blown off the gun!"

"But who 'as the blinkin' bridge?"

"You wouldn't know his name," said Smooth. "But it's not Churchill!"

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HE RAN along the passage, waved to Gilda and started toward the pile of cases and hatchcovers. The freighter had stopped her engines and a line of signal flags was lifting toward the yard. Center and his men had taken cover, confident the guns on the submarine could handle the situation. Smooth saw the *Woots* circling in the distance. Nearer, he saw an oilslick and two men swimming. One might have been Hodkins. Smooth wasn't sure. He hadn't time to look twice.

He ran forward along the littered deck. Behind him came the tall seaman with the axe. Others crouched low as they headed for ladders leading to the boat deck. A man on the bridge shouted. A gun flared and then another. Smooth raced along the boat deck and started up a second ladder that led to the bridge.

"Here! Over here!" cried a man above him. "They're coming!"

Smooth saw a pair of dungaree-covered legs. He lifted his gun and lined it on a gray sweater, pulled the trigger and climbed. The *Malay Princess* staggered as her six-inch fired.

Some of the gun crew had swarmed up the port side. Smooth heard one man blinkin' and blindin' as he fired an automatic. He heard a man scream, and the sound of an axe going home. A pair of gray eyes looked over the barrel of a sub-machine gun at him. Smooth dropped flat and fired. The gun chattered and fell to the deck.

"All clear!" called a seaman. "All clear up 'ere! Watch those beggers below!"

Smooth looked down. Two men were on the after deck. Each held a sub-machine gun and stared about in bewilderment. One pointed aft as the six-inch bellowed again. The other doubled toward the sub. Smooth figured them for the men who had been sent below to watch the black gang. He lifted his gun but one of the gun crew beat him to it. An automatic flared once. A second time and a third.

"Got 'im, that 'ow," cried the seaman. He fired twice again. "An' 'ow does yer like that, yer blighter? Try yer tricks on us, will yer?"

He waved derisively.

"Save it!" yelled Smooth. He braced himself as flame spouted from the submarine's six-inch. The shell tore through the boat deck and scattered wood and steel splinters. "Get back to the gun! You birds have a real fight coming up!"

Smooth opened the door of the chart-room and glanced at the bulkhead. A chronometer marked the time as four o'clock. The sun was sliding toward the western horizon. All day, it had raced across the sky. Now it dragged.

Haley hadn't been on deck. He wasn't on the bridge. But wherever he was, the bomb-sight was with him. Smooth didn't think the gun crew could stand off the sub. The chances were all against it with the *Malay Princess* wallowing in the trough of the sea.

The U-boat had opened fire when she was off the beam. As Smooth came in from the bridge deck she had been running forward. He heard another roar from the gun mounted aft. That meant the sub was still within range. A shell burst on the forward deck and shrapnel screamed through the windows of the bridge. That meant the sub's gunners weren't loafing, either.

Smooth ran along a passage, looking into each cabin. The skipper and two mates were in one, trussed and stretched in the bunks. They shouted at him and Smooth stopped long enough to free the captain. He didn't wait to answer questions but ran to

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the next cabin. It was empty. A crossover took him to the port passage.

A door was open near the end and Nadja Sherene was leaning against it. A small automatic was in her hand and she was looking down toward the deck of the cabin. As Smooth ran toward her she lifted her hand and leveled the gun.

"Hold it, Nadja!" cried Smooth. The sound of the shot covered his words. "No, Nadja—don't!"

"Hello, Smooth," she said quietly. She didn't look up but leveled the gun again. "Keep out of this, please. Center claims he sent the message. There's been no answer and I think he lied to me. I'm trying to learn the truth."

SMOOTH grabbed her hand and twisted the gun free. He looked down at the man on the deck. Haley was crumpled against a canvas bag. There was blood at the knee of each trouser leg. His face was smeared with it and there was more on his shirt front. His eyes were open and he was trying a smile. It was sour with pain.

"Great kid, isn't she?" he whispered. "Swell—actress, too."

Smooth knelt beside him as the *Malay Princess* lurched under the impact of another shell. "You're just about washed up, Dave," he said. "At that, you're only beating the rest of us by a few minutes. Why not come through and tell her the truth?"

"I—am," said Haley. The words were an effort. "That's what's—funny. I sent the message even though—I knew she'd been crossing me."

"You knew she'd tipped me to the setup?"

"Act smart—pal. Of course I—" He forced himself erect, pushing his hands hard against the deck. Then he lifted one and held it high with the palm up. "I gave what I had—for the Fatherland!"

He said it again in a foreign tongue, then his eyes closed and his arm went limp. He slid back against the canvas bag that held the bomb-sight and his head jerked as the freighter was hit again. Smooth stood up. He looked at Nadja. She was staring down at Haley.

"He learned his trade in a different school," said Smooth quietly. "Otherwise—he wasn't a bad guy." He took Nadja's arm and walked with her to another cabin. "Stay here until the argument is over. One spot is as good as another on this crate right now. Better dig up a life preserver while you're resting."

HE TURNED and hurried back to the chart room. The captain was there, looking through a pair of glasses toward the horizon. Beside him stood Gilda. She beckoned to Smooth and pointed toward the sky. A Navy plane was screaming down from the blue. It dived toward the deck of the submarine. Its machine gun was doing a fast job of strafing and the sub's gun crew had been caught flatfooted. The roar of their gun had dulled their ears and it wasn't until the plane had opened fire that they had started to run toward the conning tower.

They were late—seconds late. Some went down and others jumped for the small bridge. The plane banked and dived again. Those on the small bridge dropped to their knees. The sub's decks went awash. Soon waves were breaking against the conning tower. The plane leveled off and raced toward the east.

"Pretty, aren't they?" said Gilda quietly. She pointed across the water. "How long will it take them to reach us?"

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Smooth looked to the east. Two destroyers were coming over the horizon. Another was racing toward the freighter from the north. Off to the south Smooth saw a fourth. He walked to the leather-cushioned bench that extended along the after bulkhead of the chart room. His knees buckled as he reached it. He seated himself and closed his eyes.

"Is it the company?" asked Gilda. She sat down beside him and reached over to brush the hair from his eyes.

"Lady," said Smooth wearily. "Would you mind if I just didn't try to think up an answer? Right now I could use a soft shoulder to rest my head on."

"Will mine do? It's a little out of practice but—"

"Where is it?" asked Smooth.

Gilda pulled his head against her shoulder and rested her cheek on his forehead. "You're utterly insane, darling," she said gently. "Some day I'm going to meet a nice sensible man who owns a home in the suburbs and catches the five-fifteen every night."

"And then what?"

"He'll ask me to marry him."

"And then what?" asked Smooth sleepily.

"I will."

"Huh?" cried Smooth. He lifted his head. "What would you do with a sensible husband?"

"Live with him, I suppose. What would you do with a sensible wife?"

"How do I know?" said Smooth. "I never expect to have one. As soon as I catch up with a night's sleep, I'm going to marry you."

He put his head back on Gilda's shoulder and went to sleep.

Looking Ahead!

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CHANDLER WHIPPLE

COMING IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—APRIL 20th

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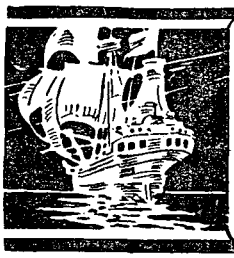

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

THIS corner is roped off for the exclusive use of Charles Marquis Warren, and he should have a happy time in it. He's a comparative newcomer to ARGOSY, the author of a story called "Then I'll Remember," which we personally thought was exceptional and exciting stuff. It's pleasant to find people agreeing with us, a whole Argonotes' worth of them. They want, they chorus, more Warren.

Well, we've fixed that—with the brilliant assistance of Mr. Warren. The answer to the following letters can be found on page six of this issue; it's a five-part answer, and a stirring one. As for you, Mr. Warren, here's your public.

JACK CARROLL

"Then I'll Remember" is the best thing you have published in months. I read ARGOSY all of the time and find it pleasant reading, enough so that I come back every week for another dose. But this time I can't wait until Wednesday for the new issue. I want it right now because C. M. Warren did such a swell job of getting me interested in his amnesia story that I won't have a minute's peace of mind until I finish it.

I know that writing about this to you will not bring me next week's ARGOSY one minute sooner. It is but one reader's way of asking you to corner Warren long enough to wheedle another story out of him. For I like the suspense and it will be all right with me if you get me in this state every week.

Here's to more stories I'll remember!
DOWNEY, CALIFORNIA.

JOHN REAVES

Some of the stories you publish are wont to bring criticism to my mind and tongue. So, to appease my conscience, I'm dropping you this line to let you know I surely enjoyed "Then I'll Remember," by C. M. Warren. If another one of his comes your way I wish you would see your way to publishing it. You know best, I guess.

Here's hoping you find some more yarns which don't tell you the finish before you start.
TUCSON, ARIZONA.

MRS. H. C. SMITH

A friend of ours sent us a copy of the February 10th ARGOSY, because it contained a story about amnesia similar to the kind of amnesia from which my husband suffered several years ago.

Until this time we have both considered the pulps as necessary mass publications—rather carelessly put together and indifferently written. Having just finished the second half of "Then I'll Remember," I must say we enjoyed it thoroughly.

In spite of its action plot, it was so well written we felt certain passages worthy of the best slicks. Mr. Charles Marquis Warren has a real style, as well as exciting and interesting presentation.

Now that we've became ARGOSY minded, we hope to see more of his stories and others that are as well written.
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA.

Thanks, folks! And now—here we go again with Warren.

He had the Brains of a White Man—the Courage and Savagery of a Pagan. Not Since Tarzan Has Fiction Produced a More Fascinating Character Than

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